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Maclaren's

EXPOSITIONS
of
HOLY SCRIPTURE

by
ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D.D., Litt.D.

Volume 10

II Timothy, Titus,
Philemon, Hebrews,
James, Ephesians

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

SECOND TIMOTHY, TITUS, PHILEMON AND HEBREWS

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II. TIMOTHY

A VETERAN'S COUNSELS TO A YOUNG SOLDIER

> 'Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, 2. To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; 4. Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; 5. When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. 6. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance, that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. 7. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.'—2 TIM. i. 1-7.
>
> 'But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; 15. And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 16. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17. That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.'—2 TIM. iii. 14-17.

PAUL'S heart had been drawn to Timothy long before this letter was written, as far back as the beginning of his second missionary journey, and Timothy had cherished the enthusiastic devotion of a young man for his great leader. He seems to have been the best beloved of the circle which the magnetism of Paul's character bound to him.

The tone of the two epistles suggests that Timothy needed to be braced up, and have a tonic administered. Probably he inclined to be too much affected by difficulties and opposition, and required the 'soul-animating strains' which Paul sounded in his ears. Possibly the Apostle's imprisonment and evidently impending death had discouraged and saddened the younger and weaker man. At all events, it is beautiful and pathetic that the words of cheer and brave trust should come from the martyr, and not from the sorrowing friend. Timothy should have been the encourager of Paul, but Paul was the encourager of Timothy.

The verses of this passage embody mainly two counsels. Verse 6 exhorts Timothy to 'stir up the gift' that was in him; chapter iii. 14 bids him 'abide in the things which' he has learned. These two—diligent effort to increase his spiritual force and persistent holding by the teaching already received—are based on Paul's knowledge of his faith and on Timothy's knowledge of the saving power of that truth. But Paul loved him too ardently to give him cold counsels. The advices are wrapped in the softest covering of gracious affection and recognition of Timothy's inherited faith and personal devotion to Paul.

I. Before dealing with the advices, look at the lovely prelude in verses 1-5. Paul does not lay aside his apostolic authority, but he uses it to make his greeting more sweet and strong. What had he been made an apostle by? The will of God. What had he been made an apostle for? To make known the promise of the life which is in Christ. Thus clothed with authority, and bearing the great gift of life, he takes Timothy to his heart as his beloved child. The captain stoops to embrace the private. Christ's apostle pours his love and benediction over the young servant, and when such lips wish 'grace, mercy, and peace,' the wish is a prophecy as much as a prayer.

The flow of Paul's love outstrips that of his words, and there is some verbal obscurity in verses 3-5, but the meaning is plain. Paul's thankfulness was for Timothy's 'unfeigned faith,' but when he is about to say that, other tender thoughts start up, and insist on being uttered. The language of love in absence is the same all the world over. It comes across all the intervening centuries like the speech of to-day: 'I never forget you.' But love should be sublimed by religion, and find its best expression in 'supplications.' Think of the prisoner in Rome, expecting a near death by violence, and yet telling his young friend that he was always thinking about him, Timothy, and wearying for him with a great yearning.

How beautiful is that touch, too, that the remembrance of Timothy's tears, when he had had to part from Paul, fed the Apostle's desire to see him again! And how graceful, and evidently more than graceful, is the contrast between the tears of Timothy at parting and the hoped-for joy of Paul at meeting! No wonder that such a leader kindled passionate enthusiasm.

One can fancy the throb of pleasure with which Timothy would read the recognition of his 'unfeigned faith.' It is always a memorable moment to a young beginner when a veteran lays his hand on his shoulder and acknowledges his devotion. Nor less fitted to warm Timothy's heart was the praise of his grandmother and mother. It would not only do that, but would make him feel that his descent added force to the exhortation which followed. Whoever might become careless, one who had such blood in his veins was called on to be true to his ancestral faith. One can well understand how such a beginning prepared Timothy for the succeeding counsels. But this was not art or rhetorical advice on Paul's part, but deep affection. The soil thus watered by love was ready for the seed.

II. The counsel thus delicately introduced is delicately expressed, as putting in remembrance rather than as enjoining authoritatively. Paul gives Timothy credit for having already recognised the duty. The 'gift of God' is the whole bestowments which fitted him for his work, and which were given from the Holy Spirit, through the imposition of the hands of Paul and of the elders (1 Tim. iv. 14).

But whilst there was a special force in the command to Timothy, the principle involved applies to all Christians, and in a wider aspect to all men; for every Christian has received the gift of that self-same Spirit, and every man is endowed with some gifts from God. All God's gifts are held on similar conditions. They may be neglected, and, if so, will cease as surely as an untended fire dies down into grey ashes. The highest and the lowest are alike in this. An unused muscle atrophies, an uncultivated capacity diminishes. The grace of God itself wanes if we are unfaithful stewards. The gift of the Spirit is not a substitute for our own activity, and the extent to which we possess it is determined by our rousing ourselves to tend the sacred flame.

Timothy had probably been depressed by Paul's imprisonment and the prospect of his death. He had been accustomed to lean upon the Apostle, and now the strong prop was to be withdrawn, and he was to stand alone, and, worst of all, to take up some of the tasks dropped by Paul. Therefore the Apostle tries to brace up his drooping spirit with his clear clarion note. The message comes to us all, that discouraging circumstances and heavy responsibilities are reasons for gathering ourselves up to our work, and for 'stirring up' smouldering fires kindled by God in our hearts and too often left untended by us.

Paul points to the proper effects of the gift of God, as the ground of his counsel. That Spirit does not infuse cowardice, which blenches at danger or shrinks from duty, as probably Timothy was tempted to do; but it breathes 'power' into the weak, enabling them to do and bear all things, and 'love,' which makes eager for service to God and man, at whatever cost, and 'self-control,' which curbs the tendencies to seek easy tasks and to listen to the voices within or without whispering ignoble avoidance of the narrow way. Surely this exhortation in its most general form should come to all young hearts, and summon them to open their doors for the entrance of that Divine Helper who will make them strong, loving, and masters of themselves.

III. The second exhortation in chapter iii. 14-17, like the first, presupposes Timothy's previous Christian character, and draws some of its persuasive force from his home and the dear ones there—an argument which, no doubt, Paul knew would tell on such a clinging, affectionate nature. We note the double reason for steadfastness—the teachers, and the early beginning of the knowledge of the truth. It is thought a sign of independence and advancement by many young people nowadays to fling away their mother's faith, just because it was hers, and taught them by her when they were infants. The fact that it was is no bar against investigation, nor against the adoption of other conclusions, if needful; but in the present temper of men, it is well to remember that it creates no presumption against a creed that some white-haired Lois, or some tender mother Eunice has striven to engrave it on the young heart.

But the great reason adduced for steadfast grip of the truth is that the 'sacred writings' (by which are to be understood the Old Testament) have power, as Timothy had experience, to give a wisdom which led to salvation, and to 'furnish' a Christian, especially the Christian teacher, for 'every good work.' In either of the two usually adopted renderings of verse 16, the divine origin of Scripture and its value for the manifold processes for perfecting character are broadly asserted. That origin and these uses are unaffected by variety of view as to the methods of inspiration or by critical researches. It will always be true that the Bible is the chief instrument employed by the Spirit of power and of love and of self-control to mould our characters into beauty of holiness. He who has that Spirit in his heart and the Scriptures in his hands has all he needs.

The one exhortation for such is to 'abide in' what he has received. That counsel as given to Timothy was probably directed chiefly against temptations very unlike those which attack us. But the spirit of it applies to us. It enjoins no irrational conservatism, scowling at all new thoughts, but it bids us aim at keeping up our personal hold of the central truths of Christ's incarnation, sacrifice, and gift of the Divine Spirit, which hold is slackened by worldliness and carelessness twenty times for once that it is so from intellectual dissatisfaction with the principles of Christianity.

Timothy was relegated, not only to his early memories, but to his own experience. He had not only learned these things from revered lips, but had been 'assured of' them by the response they had found and the effects they had produced in himself. That is the deepest ground of our holding fast by the gospel, and it is one we may all have. 'He that believeth hath the witness in himself,' and may wait with equanimity while the dust of controversy clears off, for he 'knows in whom he has believed,' and what that Saviour has done for and in him.

WHAT KIND OF MEN CHRIST MAKES

'For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.'—2. TIM. i. 7.

THE parts which we should naturally have expected Paul and Timothy to fill are reversed in this letter. 'Paul the aged,' a prisoner, and soon to be a martyr, might have been expected to receive encouragement and consolation. But Timothy seems to have been of a somewhat weak and timid nature, and this letter of the dying man is one long trumpet-blast to stir his courage. My text is the first of the 'soul-animating strains' which he blows. In it the Apostle would have his down-hearted young companion and helper remember what God has given him by the laying on of Paul's hands. Whether the word 'spirit' in my text be regarded as meaning the Divine Spirit which is given, or the human spirit in which that divine gift is received, the qualities enumerated in the text are those which that Divine Giver creates in that human recipient by His indwelling presence; or to put it into shorter words, my text tells us what sort of people Christianity has a tendency to make, and it tells us, too, how it sets about making them.

The enumeration is by no means intended to be either complete or scientific. It is meant to embrace, mainly, the points which Timothy wanted most. And so it dwells predominantly on the stronger, 'manly virtues, as men complacently call them. 'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind,' which last word does not stand precisely upon a level with the other three, but rather expresses the notion of self-control.

I think I shall best, in the few remarks that I offer you, bring out the meaning of the words before us if I simply follow the Apostle's rough and ready enumeration, and try to learn what he says about each of these points.

I. The first thing, then, that he would have us understand is that Christ makes fearless men.

'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice.' Now, of course, courage or timidity are very largely matters of temperament. But then, you know, the very purpose of the gospel is to mend temperaments, to restrain, and to stimulate, so as that natural defects may become excellences, and excellences may never run to seed and become defects. So whilst we have to admit that religion is not meant to obliterate natural distinctions in character, we must also remember that we insufficiently grasp the intention of the gospel which we say we believe unless we realise that it is meant to deal with the most deeply rooted defects in character, to make the crooked things straight, and the rough places plain.

So I venture to say that any man who lives in the realisation of the truths which the gospel reveals, and in the use of the gifts which the gospel communicates, will (whatever his natural disposition of apprehensiveness) be stiffened into a fearless man; and be no longer a reed shaken with the wind, but a brazen pillar, and an iron wall, amidst all dangers and enemies.

One sometimes feels as if nothing but clear-sightedness were needed to drive men into insanity. When you think of the possibilities of every life, and of the certainties of every life, of what may come to any of us, any time, and of what must come to all of us one time, the wonder is that men live without a perpetual tremor of heart, and do so largely manage to ignore the evils that ring them round. Think of our relation to God, think of what must be the result of the collision of the perfectly righteous will of His with our wayward rebellions; of what must be the consequence—if there be a God at all, and if there be such a thing as retributive acts on His part—when He sets us down to drink of the brewst that we have brewed, and to reap the harvest that we have sown. Surely, 'be troubled, ye careless ones,' is His exhortation of wisdom to men.

And then if we bring in all the other possibilities which to many of us have become in some measure past experiences, but still hang threatening on our horizon, like the half-emptied clouds of a thunderstorm, that is sure to come back again, dread seems to be wisdom. For what have we that we shall not have to part with? What do we that will not disappoint in the fruit? What dangers are there possible to humanity, concerning which you and I can say we know that 'when the overflowing scourge passes by it will not reach us'? None! none!

You may remember having seen a gymnast that used to roll a ball up a spiral with the motion of his feet. That is how we are set to roll the ball of our fortunes and prosperities up the twisting ascent, and at every moment there is the possibility of its hurtling down in ruin, and one day it certainly will. So is there anything more empty and foolish than to say to a man whose relations with God are not right, whose command of the world is so uncertain, as it surely is, and who has frowning before him the grim certainties of loss and sorrow and broken ties, and empty houses and empty hearts, and disappointments, and pillow stuffed with thorns, and souls wounded to the very quick, and, last of all, a death which has a dim something behind it that touches all consciences—to say to such a man 'Don't be afraid'? If he is not a fool he ought to be.

But then Paul comes in and says, 'God hath not given us the spirit of cowardice.' No, because He has given us the only thing that can exorcise that demon. He has given us the good news of Himself, whereby His name becomes our dearest hope instead of our ghastliest doubt. He has given us the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance and hallowing in Jesus Christ, whereby all the things whereof our consciences —which do 'make cowards of us all'—are afraid, are rectified, and some of them swept out of existence. He has given us truths which only need to be grappled and laid upon our hearts and minds to make us brave. He has assured us that 'all things work together for good,' that He Himself will never leave us. And the Master who spoke on earth so often, and in so many connections, His meek and sovereign encouragement, 'Fear not!' speaks it from the heavens to all that trust Him. 'He laid His hand upon me, and said, "Fear not!" I am the first and the last,' from whom all changes originate, by whom all events are directed, unto whom all things tend. Therefore, whosoever is wedded to Him need fear no evil, for nothing that does not hurt Christ can harm Him.

II. Christ makes strong men.

'He hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power.' Again we have to remember a previous remark as to temperament. There are differences among us in this respect. Some of us, of course, are naturally far more facile, sensitive, and yielding than others; some of us have natural force denied to our brethren. These differences will remain, and yet 'the weakest may be as David,' and although the weakest shall be made strong, the strongest shall be stronger still, 'as the angel of God.' The difference between the hind and front ranks will remain, but the whole battalion, as it were, will be shifted forwards.

Let me remind you how a condition of all that is worth doing and being is the cultivation of strength of will and of moral nature. To be weak is to be wicked nine times out of ten. I believe that the bulk of men that go wrong, that 'go to the devil,' as you say, do it, not so much because of a bias towards evil as of a fatal feebleness that is incapable of resistance; and I know of nothing that is more needed to be dinned into the ears—especially of the young who have their chances before them yet—than this truth: the man that cannot say 'No!' is doomed to say 'Yes!' to all bad things that may solicit him. To be weak is to be wicked in such a world as we live in; and many of you know how fatally, facilely, and feebly you have yielded, for no other reason than because the temptation was there and you were not man enough to stop your ears to it, and let it hum past you without touching you. What is the reason why half the men in the world that are drunkards are so? Pure weakness. And so you may go all round the circle of vices and you will find that weakness is ordinarily wickedness, and it is always misery. As Milton's Satan tells us, to be 'weak is to be miserable, doing or suffering.' And it is generally failure, as witness the experience of thousands of men who have come into this city and been beaten in the race.

How then is a man to get strength? Brethren, I do not want to exalt the gospel of Jesus Christ by depreciating other and lower means by which feeble natures may get a dose of steel into their system. There *are* such ways, and they do help men. But if you want to have a power within you that will enable you to 'stand foursquare to every wind that blows,' believe me the surest way of getting it is by faith in Jesus Christ, to open your hearts to the entrance into them of that 'strong Son of God' who sends His mighty Spirit into every spirit that will accept it, to be the source of uncreated and triumphant strength. If we would only keep near to Jesus Christ, and live with hearts open for the influx of His great communications, we should need nothing else to make us strong for all service, against all temptation, in the midst of all suffering. There is a gift offered to every one of us in the gospel of Jesus Christ which will make our weakness into strength. A piece of sponge put into a so-called petrifying well is turned into a mass solid as iron by the infiltration of stony particles. So our yielding softness may be converted into firmness which will resist every pressure if we receive into our hearts the grace which Christ gives. He who is strong in the Lord and in the power of His might, and he only, is truly strong. If then you want power learn where it is stored.—

'His strength was as the strength of ten,
Because his heart was pure.'

There is part of the secret. But how is the heart to be made pure? By the entrance into it of the purifying Christ. Christ makes fearless and strong men.

III. Christ makes loving men.

'Tis excellent to have a giant's strength;
'Tis tyrannous to use it like a giant!'

And power ever tends to be tyrannous. The consciousness of strength is ever apt to degenerate into insolence, uncharitableness, want of sympathy with, and contempt for, weakness. And so, very beautifully, side by side with power, Paul puts love. There are some great moral teachers of this generation, and of the last, whose whole teaching has been fatally vitiated, for this amongst other reasons, because they lost sight of the fact that the strongest thing in the universe is love. But Paul, not a philosopher, and not in the least degree trying to set forth scientifically the relations or the limitations of the virtues that he speaks about, like a skilful painter, instinctively knows what tint will best bring up the one that is laid beside it, or like some jeweller with an eye to effect, understands how to dispose the stones in his bracelet, that the cool green of the emerald may be set off by, and set off, the flashing red of the ruby and the deep blue of the sapphire. So he says, Christ makes strong men, but He makes loving men too. 'Quit you like men, be strong. Let all your deeds be done in charity.' And cultivate no strength for yourselves, nor admire any in others, in which power is divorced from pity and tenderness.

I need not remind you of the one sovereign way by which Jesus Christ in His gospel wins men from that self-centred absorption in which they live, and which is the root of all sin, into that love which is the child of faith and the parent of all virtue. There is only one thing that makes men loving, and that is that they should be loved. And Jesus Christ, the incarnate Love, and Lover of all our souls, comes to us and shows us His hands and His side, and says, 'God—I in Him and

He in Me—*so* loved the world, as these wounds tell.' We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. Christ makes us love Him because He assures us that we are loved by Him.

III. And lastly, Jesus Christ makes self-governing men.

I need not trouble you with any vindication of the rendering which for 'sound mind,' substitutes 'self-control.' I need only, in a word, ask you to consider how manifestly we are made so as to need the exercise continually of firm and resolute self-government. We have tastes and desires rooted in the flesh, and others, of which the gratification is perfectly legitimate, but which to make the guides of life, or to gratify without stint and without restraint, is ruinous. Blind passions are not meant to guide seeing reason; but if reason be the eye it is meant to guide the blind. And the men who live 'by nature,' which is a polite way of saying 'live by the worst half of their nature, and their animal passions,' are sure to land before long in the ditch.

We have only to look at ourselves and see how there are in us a whole clamorous mob of desires, like nine-days' kittens, with their eyes shut and their mouths open, yelping for their sustenance; and, further, to mark how in each man there is a voice that says, 'Thou shalt, thou shalt not; thou oughtest, thou oughtest not'—we need only, I say, look at ourselves to know that he is meant to coerce and keep well down under hatches all these blind propensions and desires, and to set sovereign above them a will that cannot be bribed, a reason that will not be deceived, and a conscience that will be true to God. Govern yourselves, or you will come all to pieces.

Yes, and what is the use of saying that to men who cannot govern themselves, whose very disease is that they cannot; and who cry out often and often, sometimes before they have gone wrong and sometimes afterwards, 'Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' It is no use to tell a discrowned and deposed monarch to rule his kingdom. The mischief is that it is in full revolt, and he has no soldiers behind him. As Bishop Butler says, 'If conscience had power, as it has authority, it would govern the world.' But authority without power is but a jest. So it is no good for conscience to give forth proclamations that are worth no more than the paper that they are written on, when my will has been talked over or enfeebled, and my desires and passions have got the bit between their teeth, and are tearing down the road to the inevitable collision.

Brethren, there is only one thing that will give complete self-command. If you make trial, I will guarantee that it will not fail. Trust to Jesus Christ; ask Him to govern, and He will help you to control yourselves. That is the noblest conquest that any man can make. 'Every man is a king, and crowns himself when he puts on his own hat,' says our quaint moralist. Wherever you are master, be you master inside your own soul. And that you may, be the servant of Him who alone will make you master of yourself and of the world. In Christ the most timid may 'wax valiant in fight,' the 'weakest may be made strong,' the most self-centred heart be opened for love which is peace and joy, and the wildest revolt in the little kingdom within may be subdued. If we will only go to Him, and trust Him with ourselves, and live in true communion with Him, and in patient exercise of the gifts that He bestows, then He will say to us as of old, 'Fear not! My strength is made perfect in weakness.' His love will kindle answering flames in us; and He who brought the raging maniac, whom no chains could bind, to sit quietly at His feet, will give us authority over the one city which we have to govern, and will make the flesh the servant of the emancipated and enfranchised spirit.

A QUIET HEART

'. . . I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'—2 TIM. i. 12.

THERE is some ambiguity in the original words of this text, lying in that clause which is translated in our Bibles—both Authorised and Revised—'that which I have committed unto Him.' The margin of the Revised Version gives as an alternative reading, 'that which He hath committed unto me.' To a mere English reader it may be a puzzle how any words whatever could be susceptible of these two different interpretations. But the mystery is solved by the additional note which the same Revised Version gives, which tells us that the Greek is 'my deposit,' or I might add another synonymous word, 'my trust.'

Now you can see that 'my trust' may mean either something with which I trust another, or something with which another trusts me. So the possibility of either rendering arises. It is somewhat difficult to decide between the two. I do not purpose to trouble you with reasons for my preference here. Suffice it to say that, whilst there are strong arguments in favour of the reading 'that which He has committed unto me,' I am inclined to think that the congruity of the whole representation, and especially the thought that this 'trust,' whatever it is, is something which God has to keep, rather than which Paul has to keep, shuts us up to the adoption of the rendering which stands in our Bibles.

Adopting it, therefore, though with some hesitation, the next question arises, What is it that Paul committed to God? The answer to that is, himself, in all his complex being, with all his fears and anxieties, during the whole duration of his existence. He has done what another Apostle exhorts us to do, 'committed the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' Now that was a long past act at the time when Paul wrote this letter. And here he looks back upon life, and sees that all the experiences through which he has passed have but confirmed the faith which he rested in God before the experiences, and that, with the axe and the block almost in sight, he is neither ashamed of his faith, nor dissatisfied with what it has brought him.

I. Notice, then, in the first place, 'the deposit' of faith.

You observe that the two clauses of my text refer to the same act, which in the one is described as 'In whom I have *trusted*'; and in the other as '*committing* something to Him.' The metaphor is a plain enough one. A man has some rich treasure. He is afraid of losing it, he is doubtful of his own power to keep it; he looks about for some reliable person and trusted hands, and he deposits it there. That is about as good a description of what the New Testament means by 'faith' as you will get anywhere.

You and I have one treasure, whatever else we may have or not have; and that is ourselves. The most precious of our possessions is our own individual being.

We cannot 'keep' that. There are dangers all round us. We are like men travelling in a land full of pickpockets and highwaymen, laden with gold and precious stones. On every side there are enemies that seek to rob us of that which is our true treasure—our own souls. We cannot keep ourselves. Slippery paths and weak feet go ill together. The tow in our hearts, and the fiery sparks of temptation that are flying all round about us, are sure to come together and make a blaze. We shall certainly come to ruin if we seek to get through life, to do its work, to face its difficulties, to cope with its struggles, to master its temptations, in our own poor, puny strength. So we must look for trusty hands and lodge our treasure there, where it is safe.

And how am I to do that? By humble dependence upon God revealed, for our faith's feeble fingers to grasp, in the person and work of His dear Son, who has died on the Cross for us all; by constant realisation of His divine presence and implicit reliance on the realities of His sustaining hand in all our difficulties, and His shielding protection in all our struggles, and His sanctifying spirit in all our conflicts with evil. And not only by the realisation of His presence and of our dependence upon Him, nor only by the consciousness of our own insufficiency, and the departing from all self-reliance, but as an essential part of our committing ourselves to God, by bringing our wills into harmony with His will. To *com*mit includes to *sub*mit.

And, oh, brother! if thus knowing your weakness, you will turn to Him for strength, if the language of your hearts be

'Myself I cannot save,
Myself I cannot keep,
But strength in Thee I surely have,
Whose eyelids never sleep.'

And if thus, hanging upon Him, you believe that when you fling yourself into necessary temptations, and cope with appointed heavy tasks, and receive on your hearts the full blow of sent sorrows, He will strengthen you and hold you up; and if with all your hearts you bow, and you say, 'Lord! keeping me is Thy business far more than mine; into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' be sure that your trust will not be disappointed.

Notice, further, about this deposit of faith, how Paul has no doubt that he has made it, and is not at all afraid to say that he has. Ay! there are plenty of you professing Christians who have never got the length which all Christian people should arrive at, of a calm certainty in the reality of your own faith. Do you feel, my brother, that there is no doubt about it, that you are trusting upon Jesus Christ? If you do, well; if the life confirms the confidence. But whilst the deepened certitude of professing Christians as to the reality of their own faith is much to be desired, there is also much to be dreaded the easy-going assurance which a great many people who call themselves Christians have of the reality of their trust, though it neither bows their wills to God's purposes, nor makes them calm and happy in the assurance of His presence. The question for us all is, have we the right to say 'I have committed myself to Him'? If you have not, you have missed the blessedness of life, and will never carry your treasure safely through the hordes of robbers that lurk upon the road, but some day you will be found there, lying beggared, bleeding, bruised. May it be that you are found there before the end, by the merciful Samaritan who alone can bind up and lead to safety!

II. Now note, secondly, the serenity of faith.

What a grand picture of a peaceful heart comes out of this letter, and its companion one to the same friend, written a little before, but under substantially the same circumstances! They are both full of autobiographical details, on which some critics look with suspicion, but which seem to me to bear upon their very front the token of their own genuineness.

And what a picture it is that they give! He is 'Paul the aged'; old, if not in years—and he probably was not an old man by years—yet old in thought and care and hardships and toils. He is a prisoner, and the compulsory cessation of activity, when so much was to be done, might well have fretted a less eager spirit than that which burned in his puny frame. He is alone, but for one faithful friend; and the bitterness of his solitude is increased by the apostasy of some and the negligence of many. He is poor and thinly clad; and he wants his one cloak 'before winter.' He has been before the emperor once, and though he 'was delivered from the mouth of the lion' then, he knows that he cannot expect to put his head into the lion's mouth a second time with impunity, and that his course is run. He has made but a poor thing of life; he has disappointed all the hopes that were formed of the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, who was bidding fair to be the hammer of these heretical Christians. And yet there is no tremor nor despondency in this, his swan-song. It goes up in a clear burst of joyful music. It is the same spirit as that of the Psalmist: 'There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us.' And serenely he sits there, in the midst of dangers, disappointments, difficulties, and struggles, with a life behind him stuffed full of thorns and hard work and many a care, and close before him the martyr's death, yet he says, with a flash of legitimate pride, 'I am not *ashamed*, for I know whom I have trusted, and that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.'

My brother, you must have Paul's faith if you are to have Paul's serenity. A quiet committal of yourself to God, in all the ways in which I have already described that committal as carried out, is the only thing which will give us quiet hearts, amidst the dangers and disappointments and difficulties and conflicts which we have all to encounter in this world. That trust in Him will bring, in the measure of its own depth and constancy, a proportionately deep and constant calm in our hearts.

For even though my faith brought me nothing from God, the very fact that I have rolled my care off my shoulders on to His, though I had made a mistake in doing it, would bring me tranquillity, as long as I believed that the burden was on His shoulders and not on mine. Trust is always quiet. When I can say, 'I am not the master of the caravan, and it is no part of my business to settle the route, I have no responsibility for providing food, or watching, or anything else. All my business is to obey orders, and to take the step nearest me and wait for the light,' then I can be very quiet whatever comes. And if I have cast my burden upon the Lord, I am *not* delivered from responsibility, but I *am* delivered from harassment. I have still tasks and duties, but they are all different when I think of them as His appointing. I have still difficulties and dangers, but I can meet them all with a new peacefulness if I say, 'God is Master here. and I am in His hands, and He will do what He likes with me.' That is not the abnegation of will, it is the vitalising of will. And no man is ever so strong as the man who feels 'it is God's business to take care of me; it is my business to do what He tells me.'

That, dear friends, is the only armour that will resist the cuts and blows that are sure to be aimed at you. What sort of armour do you wear? Is it of pasteboard painted to look like steel, like the breastplates and helmets of actors upon the stage in a theatre? A great deal of our armour is. Do you get rid of all that make-believe, and put on the breastplate of righteousness, and for a helmet the hope of salvation, and, above all, take the shield of faith; and trust in the Lord whate'er betide, and you will stand against all assaults. Paul's faith is the only recipe for securing Paul's serenity.

And then, further, note how this same quiet committal of himself into the loving hands of his Father—whom he had learned to know because he had learned to trust His Son—is not only the armour against all the dangers and difficulties in life, but is also the secret of serene gazing into the eyes of close death. Paul knew that his days were nearly at an end; he was under no illusions as to that, for you remember the grand burst of confidence, even grander than this of my text, in this same letter, with which he seems to greet the coming of the end, and exclaims, with a kind of Hallelujah! in his tone, 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. And there is nothing left for me now, now when the struggles are over and the heat and dust of the arena are behind me, but, panting and victorious, to receive the crown.' He knows that death is sure and near;

and yet in this same letter he says, 'I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion, and the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and save me into His everlasting kingdom.' Did he, then, expect to escape from the headsman's block? Was he beginning to falter in his belief that martyrdom was certain? By no means. The martyrdom *was* the deliverance. The striking off of his head by the sharp axe was the 'saving of him into the everlasting kingdom.' His faith, grasping Jesus Christ, who abolished death, changes the whole aspect of death to him; and instead of a terror it becomes God's angel that will come to the prisoner and touch him, and say, 'Arise!' and the fetters will fall from off his feet, and the angel will lead him through 'the gate that opens of its own accord,' and presently he will find himself in the city. That is to say, true confidence in God revealed in Jesus Christ is the armour, not only against the ills of life, but against the inevitable ill of death. It changes the whole aspect of the 'shadow feared of man.'

Now I know that there is a danger in urging the reception of the gospel of Jesus Christ on the ground of its preparing us for death. And I know that the main reasons for being Christians would continue in full force if there were no death; but I know also that we are all of us far too apt to ignore that grim certainty that lies gaping for us, somewhere on the road. And if we have certainly to go down into the common darkness, and to tread with our feet the path that all but two of God's favourites have trod, it is as well to look the fact in the face, and be ready. I do not want to frighten any man into being a Christian, but I do beseech each of you, brethren, to lay to heart that you will have to grapple with that last enemy, and I ask you, as you love your own souls, to make honest work of this question, Am I ready for that summons when it comes, because I have committed my soul, body, and spirit into His hands, and I can quietly say, 'Thou wilt not leave my soul in the grave, nor wilt Thou suffer Thy servant to see corruption'?

Paul's faith made him serene in life and victorious over death; and it will do the same for you.

III. So note, further, the experience of faith.

In the first clause of our text the Apostle says:—'*I know* whom I have trusted.' And it is because he knows Him that therefore he is persuaded that 'He is able to keep.'

How did Paul know Him? By experience. By the experience of his daily life. By all these years of trial and yet of blessedness through which he had passed; by all the revelations that had been made to his waiting heart as the consequence and as the reward of the humble faith that rested upon God. And so the whole past had confirmed to him the initial confidence which knit him to Jesus Christ.

If you want to know the worth of Christian faith, exercise it. We must trust, to begin with, *before* experience. But the faith that is built upon a lifetime is a far stronger thing than the tremulous faith that, out of darkness, stretches a groping hand, and for the first time lays hold upon God's outstretched hand. We hope *then*, we tremblingly trust, we believe on the authority of His word. But after years have passed, we can say, 'We have heard Him ourselves, and we *know* that this is the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

Further, none who truly commit themselves to God ever regret it. Is there anything else of which you can say that? Is there any other sort of life that never turns out a disappointment and bitterness and ashes in the mouth of the man that feeds upon it? And is it not something of an evidence of the reality of the Christian's faith that millions of men are able to stand up and say, 'Lo! we have put our confidence in Him and we are not ashamed?' '*This* poor man cried and the Lord heard him, and delivered him out of all his troubles. *They* looked unto God and were lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' You cannot share in the conviction, the issue of experience which a Christian man has, if you are not a Christian. My inward evidence of the reality of the Gospel truth, which I have won because I trusted Him when I had not the experience, cannot be shared with anybody besides. You must 'taste' before you 'see that the Lord is good.' But the fact that there is such a conviction, and the fact that there is nothing on the other side of the sheet to contradict it, ought to weigh something in the scale. Try Him and trust Him, and your experience will be, as that of all who have trusted Him has been, 'that this hope maketh not ashamed.'

IV. Lastly, note here the goal of faith.

'Against that day.' The Apostle has many allusions to *that day* in this final letter. It was evidently, as was natural under the circumstances, much in his mind. And the tone of the allusions is remarkable. Remember what Paul believed *that day* was—a day when he 'and all men would stand before the judgment' bar of an omniscient and all-righteous, Divine Judge, to receive 'the deeds done in the body.' A solemn thought and a firm conviction, and a profound impression as to *that day*, were in his mind. And in the face of all this, he says, 'I know that He will keep this poor soul of mine against *that day*.'

Ah, my brother! it is easy for you to shuffle out of your thoughts the judgment-seat before which we must all stand, and *so* to be quiet. It is easy for you to question, in a so-called intellectual scepticism, the New Testament revelations as to the future, and *so* to be quiet. It is easy for you to persuade yourselves of the application there of another standard of judgment than that which Scripture reveals, and to say, 'If I have done my best God will not be hard upon me,' and *so* to be quiet. But, supposing that that certain tribunal blazed upon you; supposing that you could not get rid of the thought that you were to stand there, and supposing that you realised, further, the rigidity of that judgment, and how it penetrates to the discerning of the thoughts and intents of the heart, would you be quiet then? *Should* you be quiet then? This man was. How? Why? Because, in patient trust, he had put his soul into God's hands, and a lifetime had taught him that his trust was not in vain.

If you want like peace in life, like victory in death, like boldness in the Day of Judgment, oh, dear friend! —friend though unknown—let me plead with you to seek it where Paul found it, and where you will find it, in simple faith on God manifest in His Son.

'SOUND WORDS'

'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.'—2 TIM. i. 13.

ANY great author or artist passes, in the course of his work, from one manner to another; so that a person familiar with him can date pretty accurately his books or pictures as being in his 'earlier' or 'later' style So there is nothing surprising in the fact that there are great differences between Paul's last writings and his previous ones. The surprising thing would have been if there had not been such differences. The peculiarities of the so-called three pastoral Epistles (the two to Timothy, and the one to Titus) are not greater than can fairly be accounted for by advancing years, changed circumstances, and the emergence of new difficulties and enemies.

Amongst them there are certain expressions, very frequent in these letters and wholly unknown in any of Paul's other work. These have been pounced upon as disproving the genuineness of these letters, but they only do so if you assume that a man, when he gets old, must never use any words that he did not use when he was young, whatever new ideas may have come to him. Now, in this text of mine is one of these phrases peculiar to these later letters—'sound words.' That phrase and its parallel one, 'sound doctrine,' occur in all some half-dozen times in these letters, and never anywhere else. The expression has become very common among us. It is more often used than understood; and the popular interpretation of it hides its real meaning and obscures the very important lessons which are to be drawn from the true understanding of it, lessons which, I take leave to think, modern Christianity stands very sorely in need of. I desire now to try to unfold the thoughts and lessons contained in this phrase.

I. What does Paul mean by a 'form of sound words'?

I begin the answer by saying that he does not mean a doctrinal formula. The word here rendered 'form' is the same which he employs in the first of the letters to Timothy, when he speaks of himself and his own conversion as being 'a pattern to them that should hereafter believe.' The notion intended here is not a cut-and-dried creed, but a body of teaching which will not be compressed within the limits of an iron form, but will be a pattern for the lives of the men to whom it is given. The Revised Version has 'the pattern,' and not 'the form.' I take leave to think that there were no creeds in the apostolic time, and that the Church would probably have had a firmer grasp of God's truth if there had never been any. At all events the idea of a cast-iron creed, into which the whole magnificence of the Christian faith is crushed, is by no means Paul's idea in the word here. Then, with regard to the other part of the phrase—'sound words'—we all know how that is generally understood by people. Words are supposed to be 'sound,' when they are in conformity with the creed of the critic. A sound High Churchman is an entirely different person from a sound Nonconformist. Puritan and Sacramentarian differ with regard to the standard which they set up, but they use the word in the same way, to express theological statements in conformity with that standard. And we all know how harshly the judgment is sometimes made, and how easy it is to damn a man by a solemn shake of the head or a shrug of the shoulders, and the question whether he is 'sound.'

Now, all that is clean away from the apostolic notion of the word in question. If we turn to the other form of this phrase, which occurs frequently in these letters, 'sound doctrine,' there is another remark to be made. 'Doctrine' conveys to the ordinary reader the notion of an abstract, dry, theological statement of some truth. Now, what the Apostle means is not 'doctrine' so much as 'teaching'; and if you will substitute 'teaching' for 'doctrine' you get much nearer his thought; just as you will get nearer it if for ‘sound,’ with its meaning of conformity to a theological standard, you substitute what the word really means, ‘healthy,’ wholesome, health-giving, healing. All these ideas run into each other. That which is in itself healthy is health-giving as food, and as a medicine is healing. The Apostle is not describing the teaching that he had given to Timothy by its conformity with any standard, but is pointing to its essential nature as being wholesome, sound in a physical sense; and to its effect as being healthy and health-giving. Keep hold of that thought and the whole aspect of this saying changes at once.

There is only one other point that I would suggest in this first part of my sermon, as to the Apostolic meaning of these words, and it is this: ‘healing’ and ‘holy’ are etymologically connected, they tell us. The healing properties of the teaching to which Paul refers are to be found entirely in this—its tendency to make men better, to produce a purer morality, a loftier goodness, a more unselfish love, and so to bring harmony and health into the diseased nature. The one healing for a man is to be holy; and, says Paul, the way to be holy is to keep a firm hold of that body of teaching which I have presented.

Now, that this tendency to produce nobler manners and purer conduct and holier character is the true meaning of the word ‘sound’ here, and not ‘orthodox’ as we generally take it, will be quite clear, I think, if you will notice how, in another part of these same letters, the Apostle gives a long catalogue of the things which are contrary to the health-giving doctrine. If the ordinary notion of the expression were correct, that catalogue ought to be a list of heresies. But what is it? A black list of vices—'deceivers,' 'ungodly,' 'sinners,' 'unholy,' 'profane,' 'murderers,' 'manslayers,' 'whoremongers,' 'man-stealers,' 'liars,' 'perjured' persons. Not one of these refers to aberration of opinion; all of them point to divergences of conduct, and these are the things that are contrary to the healing doctrine. But they are not contrary, often, to sound orthodoxy. For there have been a great many imitators of that king of France, who carried little leaden images of saints and the Virgin in his hat and the devil in his heart. 'The form of sound words' is the pattern of healing teaching, which proves itself healing because it makes holy. Now, that is my first question answered.

II. Where Paul thought these healing words were to be found.

He had no doubt whatever as to that. They were in the message that he preached of Jesus Christ and His salvation. There and there only, in his estimation and inspired teaching, are such words to be found. The truth of Christ, His incarnation, His sacrifice, His resurrection, His ascension, the gift of His Divine Spirit, with all the mighty truths on which these great facts rest, and all which flow from these great facts, these, in the aggregate, are the health-giving words for the sickly world.

Now, historically, it is proved to be so. I do not need to defend, as if it were in full conformity with the dictates and principles of Christianity, the life and practice of any generation of Christian people. But this I do venture to say, that the world has been slowly lifted, all through the generations, by the influence, direct and indirect, of the great truths of Christianity, and that to-day the very men who, in the name of certain large principles which they have learned from the gospel, are desirous of brushing aside the old-fashioned gospel, are kicking down the ladder by which they climbed, and that, with all the imperfections, for which we have to take shame to ourselves before God, still the reflection of the perfect Image which is cast into the world from the mirror of the collective Christian conduct and character, though it be distorted by many a flaw in the glass, and imperfect by reason of many a piece of the reflecting medium having dropped away, is still the fairest embodiment of character that the world has ever seen. Why, what is the meaning of the sarcasms that we have all heard, till we are wearied of them, about 'the Nonconformist conscience'? The adjective is wrong; it should be 'the *Christian* conscience.' But with that correction I claim the sarcasms as unconscious testimony to the fact that the Christian ideal of character and conduct set forth, and approximately realised, by religious people, is far above the average morality of even a so-called Christian nation. And all that is due to the 'pattern of health-giving words.'

Now, the historical confirmation of Paul's claim that these health-giving words were to be found in his gospel is no more than is to be expected, if we look at the contents of that gospel to which he thus appeals. For there never has been such an instrument for regenerating individuals and society as lies in the truths of Christianity, firmly grasped and honestly worked out. Their healing power comes, first, from their giving the sense of pardon and acceptance. Brethren, there is nothing, as I humbly venture to affirm, that will go down to the fountain and origin of all the ills of man, except that teaching 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing unto them their trespasses.' That reality of guilt, that schism and alienation between man and God, must be dealt with first before you can produce high morality. Unless you deal with that central disease you do very little. Something you do; but the cancer is deep-seated, and the world's remedies for it may cure pimples on the surface, but are powerless to extirpate the malignant tumour that has laid hold of the vitals. You must begin by dealing with the disease of sin, not only in its aspect as habit, but in its consequence of guilt and responsibility and separation from God, before you can bring health to the sick man.

And then, beyond that, I need not remind you of how a higher and more wholesome morality is made possible by these health-giving words, inasmuch as they set forth for us the perfect example of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as they bring into operation love, the mightiest of all powers to mould a life, inasmuch as they open up for us, far more solemnly and certainly than ever else has been revealed, the solemn thought of judgment, and of every man giving account of himself to God, and the assurance that 'whatsoever a man soweth here, that,' a thousand-fold increased in the crop, 'shall he also reap' in the eternities. In addition to the example of perfection in the beloved Christ, the mighty motive of love, the solemn urgency of judgment and retribution, the health-giving words bring to us the assurance of a divine power dwelling within us, to lift us to heights of purity and goodness to which our unaided feet can never, never climb. And for all these reasons the message of Christ's incarnation and death is the health-giving word for the world.

But, further, let me remind you that, according to the apostolic teaching, these healing and health-giving effects will not be produced except by that gospel. Some of you, perhaps, may have listened to the first part of my sermon with approbation, because it seemed to fit in with the general disparagement of doctrine prevalent in this day. Will you listen to this part too? I venture to assert that, although there are many men apart from Christ who have as clear a conception of what they ought to be and to do as any Christian, and some men apart from Christ who do aim after high and pure, noble lives, not altogether unsuccessfully, yet on the whole, on the wide scale, and in the long-run, if you change the 'pattern of health-giving words you lower the health of the world. It seems to me that this generation is an object-lesson in that matter. Why is it that these two things are running side by side in the literature of these closing years of the century—viz., a rejection of the plain laws of morality, especially in regard of the relations of the sexes, and a rejection of the old-fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ? I venture to think that the two things stand to each other very largely in the relation of cause and effect, and that, if you want to bring back the world to Puritan morality, you will have to go back in the main to Puritan theology. I do not mean to insist upon any pinning of faith to any theological system, but this I am bound to say, and I beseech you to consider, that if you strike out from the 'pattern of health-giving words' the truth of the Incarnation, the sacrifice on the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the gift of the Spirit, the 'health-giving words' that you have left are not enough to give health to a fly.

III. Lastly, notice what Paul would have us do with these 'health-giving words.'

'Hold fast the form . . . in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus.'

Now that exhortation includes three things. Your time will not allow me to do more than just touch them. First it applies to the understanding. 'Hold fast the teaching' by letting it occupy your minds. Brethren, I am unwillingly bound to acknowledge my suspicion that a very large number of Christian people scarcely ever occupy their thoughts with the facts and principles of the gospel, and that they have no firm and intelligent grasp of these, either singly or in their connection. I would plead for less newspaper and more Bible; for less novel and more gospel. I know how hard it is for busy men to have spare energy for anything beyond their business and the necessary claims of society, but I would even venture to advise a little less of what is called Christian work, in order to get a little more Christian knowledge. 'Come ye yourselves apart into a solitary place,' said the Master; and all busy workers need that. 'Hold fast the health-giving words' by meditation, a lost art among so many Christians.

The exhortation applies next to the heart. 'Hold . . . in faith and love.' If that notion of the expression, which I have been trying to combat, were the correct one, there would be no need for anything beyond familiarising the understanding with the bearings of the doctrinal truths. But Paul sees need for a great deal more. The understanding brings to the emotions that on which they fasten and feed. Faith—which is more than credence, being an act of the will—casts itself on the truth believed, or rather on the Person revealed in the truth; and love, kindled by faith, and flowing out in grateful response, and self-abandon ment, are as needful as orthodox belief, in order to hold fast the health-giving words.

The exhortation applies, finally, to character and conduct. Emotion, even when it takes the shape of faith and love, is as little the end of God's revelation as is knowledge. He makes Himself known to us in all the greatness of His grace and love in Jesus Christ, not that we may know, and there an end, nor even that knowing, we may feel, and there an end, though a great many emotional Christians seem to think that is all; but that knowing, we may feel, and knowing and feeling, we may be and do what He would have us do and be. We have the great river flowing past our doors. It is not only intended that we should fill our cisterns by knowledge, nor only bathe our parched lips by faith and love, but that we should use it to drive all the wheels of the mill of life. Not he that understands, nor he that glows, but he that does, is the man who holds fast the pattern of sound health-giving words.

The world is like that five-porched pool in which were gathered a great multitude of sick folks. Its name is the 'House of Mercy,' for so Bethesda means, tragically as the title seems to be contradicted by the condition of the cripples and diseased lying there. But this fountain once moved gushes up for ever; and whosoever will may step into it, and immediately be made whole of whatsoever disease he has.

GOD'S STEWARDS

'That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.'—2 Tim. i. 14.

The Apostle has just been expressing his confidence for himself that 'God is able to keep that which I have committed' unto him 'against that day.' Here, with intentional parallelism, he repeats the leading ideas and key-words of that great confidence, but in a wholly different connection. Whether we suppose that the rendering of our version in the twelfth verse is correct or no, there still remains the intentional parallelism between the two verses. In discoursing upon that twelfth verse, I gave reasons for adhering to the translation of our version and regarding the parallel as double. There are two committals. God commits something to us; we commit something to God. But whether that be so or no, there are, at all events, two keepings. God keeps, and we have to keep. And if, on the other hand, in both verses the Apostle speaks of a charge committed to men by God, then the contrasted parallel between the two keepings remains and is even increased, because then it is the same thing which God keeps and which we keep. So the whole connection between man's faithfulness and God's protection is suggested here. The true Christian life in its entirety may either be regarded as God's work or the believer's. We keep ourselves when we let God keep us, and God keeps us by making us able to keep ourselves.

I. Note then, first, our charge.

The Apostle is evidently thinking mainly of the gospel message which was entrusted to Himself and to Timothy. That is shown by the whole context. The previous verse is, 'Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.' And the same connection appears in the First Epistle to Timothy, where the same exhortation is repeated: 'Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, . . .

which some professing have erred concerning the faith.' The same idea of the gospel as the deposit committed to the trust of Christian men lies in other words of the first epistle, where the Apostle speaks of the 'gospel of the glory of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.' And it crops up in other expressions of his, such as that he was 'put in trust of the gospel.' It also underlies the very common representation of himself and his colleagues as being 'stewards of the mysteries of God.' But all these expressions describe no prerogative of an apostle, or of a teaching office or order in the Church, but declare the solemn responsibility laid by the great gift bestowed upon all Christian men. Whosoever has accepted the message of salvation for himself is, *ipso facto*, put in charge of that message for carrying it to others. The trust which I place in the gospel makes the gospel a trust which is committed to me. And every believer, howsoever imperfect may be his grasp of the truth, howsoever narrow may be the sphere of his agency, has given into his hands this great charge, that the Word of God is committed to his trust.

You Christian people are responsible in this connection for two things, for the preservation of the truth and for the diffusion of the truth.

You are responsible for its preservation. Some of us, in a special manner, have it given to us in charge to oppose prevailing tendencies which rob the gospel of its glory and of its power, to try to preach it to men, whether they will hear or forbear, in its simplicity and its unwelcomeness, as well as in its sweetness and its graciousness. But for most of us, the responsibility for the preservation of the truth lies mainly in another direction, and we are bound to keep it for the food of our own souls, and to see that the atmosphere in which we live, and the prevailing tendencies around us, the worldliness, the selfishness, the absorption in the things seen to the exclusion of the things that are unseen and eternal, do not rob us of the treasure which we say that we value. See to it that you keep it as what you profess that it is, the anchor of your hope and the guide of all your lives, binding it upon the palms of your hands that all your work may be sanctified; writing it between your eyes that all your thoughts may be enlightened; and inscribing it on the posts of your doors and your gates that, whensoever you go forth to work, you may go out under its guidance and when you come back to rest and solitude, you may bear it with you for your meditation and refreshment. The charge that is given to us is the preservation of God's Word, and the gospel which we have received we have received with this written upon it, 'Hold fast that which thou hast; let no man take thy crown.'

And then, further, all of us Christian people are responsible for the diffusion of that Word. It is given to us that we may spread it, and this is no exclusive prerogative of an apostolic class, or of an order of ministers or clergy in God's Church, but every Christian man and woman who has the Word is thereby bound to tell the Word faithfully.

And then, subordinately and connected with this, I may put another thought, that the reputation and character of our Master are committed to us to keep. People take their notions of Jesus Christ a great deal more from you than from the Bible, and the Christian Church is the true scripture which most men know best. The written revelation is often negatived, or at all events neutralised, by the representation which we

Christians make of Christ. He has given into our hands His reputation, as if He said: 'Live so that men may know what sort of a Christ I am; and so set forth the spirit of life that was in Me that men may be led to believe that there is something in the truths and principles which make men like you.'

But there is a wider application legitimately to be given to the words of my text, on which I touch for a moment. The great trust which is committed to us all is ourselves; and in connection therewith we are responsible for two things—first, for the development of character; and second, for the exercise of capacity.

We are responsible for the development of character. We have to cut off and suppress, or, at least, to subordinate and regulate, a great deal within us in order that the true self may rise into sovereign majesty and power. We have to cultivate shy graces, unwelcome duties, sides of our character which are not naturally prominent. The faults that we have are not to be cured simply by the repression of them, but by the cultivation of their opposites. All this is given to *us* to do, and nobody can do it for us. We are stewards of many things, but the most precious gift of which we are stewards is this awful nature of ours, with possibilities that tower heaven-high, and evils that go down to the depths of hell, shut up within the narrow room of our hearts. The man who has *himself* put into his own hands can never want a field for diligent cultivation. And we are responsible for the use of capacities. God gives these to us that we may by exercise strengthen them. And so, brother, as a man, your natural self is your charge; as a Christian, the word which brings your better self, is that which is committed to you to keep.

II. Now, secondly, notice our keeping of our charge.

The word rendered here 'to keep' rather means 'to guard' than to keep in the sense of preserving. 'Keeping' is the consequence of the 'guarding' which my text enjoins. We may get a picture which may help us to understand the drift of the apostolic exhortation, if I remind you of two of the uses of the word in its non-metaphorical sense in Scripture. It is the expression employed to describe the occupation of the shepherds on the upland slopes of Bethlehem on Christmas Eve. They were 'keeping watch over their flocks by night.' That is how you have to watch yourselves and the word that is committed to your care. Again, it is the word employed to describe the vigilant watchfulness of the sentry outside the prison gates where the apostles lay immured; or of the four quaternions of soldiers that had to take charge of Peter when he was chained to them. And that is how we have to watch, as the shepherd over his flock, as the sentry over the prison house, or as the guard over some treasure. So Christian men and women have to live, exercising all the care needful to prevent the stealing away some of the flock, the escape of some of the prisoners, the filching from them of some of their treasure. Let me expand the apostolic exhortation into two of three precepts.

Cultivate the sense of stewardship. It is a very hard thing for us to keep fresh the feeling that all which we are and have is given to us, and that not for ourselves, but for God. The beginning of evil is the weakening of that sense of responsibility, and the dawning of the dream that we are our own. The prodigal son's downfall began with saying 'Give me the portion of goods that falleth to *me*'

And the next step came naturally after that: 'He gathered all together and went away into a far country.' And the next step came just as naturally after that: 'He wasted his substance in riotous living.'

If sense of stewardship and responsibility is weakened within us, the mainspring of all good is weakened within us, and we shall become self-willed, self-indulgent, self-asserting, God-forgetting. If we think that the talent or the pound is ours, we shall spend it for our own purposes, and that is 'waste.'

And is it not a sad commentary on the tendency of human nature to forget stewardship, and to lose the impression of responsibility, that that very word 'talents,' which is borrowed from Christ's parable, is used in common speech without the slightest sense that it suggests anything about stewardship, faithfulness, or reckoning? Let us, then, take care to cultivate the sense of responsibility.

Again, let us exercise unslumbering vigilance. A great political thinker says, 'The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.' The price of keeping the treasure that God has given us is the same. There are old legends of fabulous riches hid away in some rocky cave amongst the mountains, guarded by mythological creatures, of whom it is said that their eyes have no lids. They cannot shut them, and they never sleep. And that is what Christians need to be, with lidless, wide-opened, vigilant eyes; watching ever against the evils that are ever around us, and the robbers who are ever seeking to drag the precious deposit from our hands. Live to watch, and watch that you may live.

Then, again, familiarise yourselves with the truth which you have in charge. I am not half so much afraid that intellectual doubts and the formulated, conscious disbelief of this generation will affect Christian people, as I am afraid of the unconscious drift sweeping them away before they know. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews has a solemn figure in regard of this matter. He says: 'Let us take the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should drift past them.' And that is exactly what befalls Christian men and women who do not continually renew their familiarity with God's Word and the gospel to which they trust. Before they know where they are, the silent-flowing, swift stream has swept them down, and the truths to which they fancied they were anchored are almost invisible on the far horizon. For one man who loses his Christianity by yielding to the arguments of the other side there are ten who lose it by evaporation. 'As thy servant was busy here and there,' was the lame excuse of the man in the Old Testament for letting his prisoner run away, 'he was gone!' And God knows how he has gone and where he went.

That is true about a great many who are professing Christian people. The Word has slipped out of their hands, and they do not know how, nor exactly when it escaped from their slack fingers. If you *will* put plucked flowers into a glass without any water you cannot but expect them to wither; and if you will refrain from refreshing your belief and your trust by familiarity with the truths of the gospel, and by meditating upon these, you cannot wonder that they should shrivel up and lose their sweetness for you. Keep that word hid in your hearts that you sin not against Him and it.

And then, further, exercise your gifts. The very worst way to keep the talent is to keep it in a napkin. The man who buried it in the earth, and then dug it up and presented it to his lord, did not know how much weight it had lost by rust and decay while it was hidden away. For though gold does not rust, the gold of the talent that we possess does; and the sure way to make our gifts dwindle is that we neglect to use them. It seems an odd way to keep corn, to fling it broadcast out of a basket over the fields, but 'there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.' Live your faith; let what you believe be the guide of your practice; increase your grasp upon it by meditation and by prayer, use your capacities, exercise your faculties, and they will grow, and you will be strong.

III. Lastly, note our Ally in our keeping of our charge. 'Through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.' Then all is to be done, not in our own strength, but in the strength of the great indwelling Guest and Helper. So, then, there arise two thoughts from this.

The one is that we keep ourselves best when we give ourselves to God to keep us. The Apostle has just been doing that for himself, and he now would exhort Timothy to do the same. Our faith brings this great Ally into the field. If we commit to God what God has committed to us, then, as the patriarch, upon his dangerous and doubtful path, beheld in the heavens above him the camp of the angels hovering over his little camp, so, if we commit the keeping of ourselves and of all our responsibility in connection with God's work, to Him, we too may be sure that 'the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him,' and that He will keep us. Then there will be a fourth in the furnace like unto the Son of Man, and no fire shall consume anything but the bonds of those who, in the very fire, trust themselves to the strong hands of God. We best keep ourselves when we give ourselves to God to keep.

But another thought here is that God keeps us by enabling us to keep ourselves. 'Through the Holy Spirit that dwelleth in us'—so His protection is no mere outward wall of defence around us, nor any change of circumstances which may avert danger, but it is the putting within us of a divine life-principle which shall mould our thoughts, regulate our desires, reinforce our weakness, and be in us a power that shall preserve us from all evil. God fights for us, not in the sense of fighting instead of us, but in the sense of fighting by our sides when we fight. A faith which says, 'God will take care of me,' and does not take care of itself, is no faith, but either hypocrisy or self-deceived presumption. Faith will intensify effort instead of leading to shirk it; and the more we trust Him, the more we should ourselves work. We keep ourselves when God keeps us; God keeps us when we keep ourselves. Both things are true, and therefore our fitting temper is the double one of self-distrusting confidence and of earnest diligence.

Dear brother, we travel on a dangerous road. We never can tell from behind what rock a gun barrel may be levelled at us, or where the highwayman may swoop down upon us to rob us of our treasure. That is no country to travel through carelessly, in loose order, with our gun upon another horse away at the back of the caravan, and we ourselves straying hither and thither gathering flowers, or seeking easy places to walk in; but it is a land in which we must be unslumberingly vigilant, and screw ourselves up to all effort. And it is a country in which we shall certainly be robbed unless we commit ourselves unto Him who alone is able to keep us from falling.

'Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.'

If we say, in life and in death, 'Father! into Thy hands I commit my spirit,' then we may be humbly, but not idly confident that the old promise will be fulfilled to us: 'The Lord will keep thee ever more.'

THE TRUE AIM OF LIFE—PLEASING CHRIST

'No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.'—2 TIM. ii. 4.

PAUL had enough to do to infuse some of his own vigour into the feebler nature of Timothy. If we may judge from the prevailing tone of the Apostle's letters to him, his young assistant lacked courage and energy; was easily beaten down, needed tonics for the 'often infirmities' of his mind as well as of his body. The delicate ingenuity with which this letter accumulates all conceivable encouragements for the drooping heart that was to take up the old lion-heart's nearly finished work, is very beautiful. One topic of encouragement is conspicuous by its absence. There is no rosy painting of the Christian life, or of a Christian teacher's life, as easy or pleasant to flesh and blood. On the contrary, none of Paul's letters give more emphatic utterance to the fact that suffering is the law of both.

That is wise; for the best way to brace people for difficult work and hardship is to tell them fairly what they will have to face. It will act as a filter and Gideon's test, no doubt, but it will only filter out impure matter, and it will evoke latent enthusiasm; for there is always fascination to generous natures or fervent disciples in the thought of danger and toil, undertaken for a beloved cause or favourite pursuit. Boys are made sailors by the stories of wreck and hardship told them to keep them ashore.

So Paul *encourages* 'son Timothy' by putting before him all the toil and the peril which are the conditions of the work to which he has set his hand. In this context we have a number of illustrations and analogies, according to all of which self-denial and persistent work are indispensable. The *wrestler* has not only to brace every limb in his struggle till the muscles stand out like whipcord, but he has to abide by the laws of the arena. The *farmer* has to exercise long patience, and to labour hard in the field and wild weather, before he can sit down and eat of the fruit of the harvest. The *soldier* has not only to take his life in hand, but to abandon his civil pursuits and make the pleasure of his commander the law of his life. The diligence of other people in their worldly callings may well put us to shame; and if that is not enough, our own diligence in the one half of our life may shame our laziness in the other. All fire there, and all ice here! Ready for any sacrifice of time and pains in that, grudging every such sacrifice in this!

Our text constitutes the first of that series of illustrative metaphors, each of which adds something of its own to the general idea. In it we have a whole series of striking thoughts suggested, which can be but very imperfectly worked out in the brief space at our disposal.

I. The first thing that strikes one in the words is their grand statement of the all-comprehensive life's aim of the Christian soldier.

There is savagery and devilry enough about the soldiers' trade to make it remarkable that it should be so constantly chosen to illustrate the life of the servants of the Prince of Peace. But there are grand qualities brought out in warfare, which need but to be transferred to their most worthy object; and for the sake of these, the metaphor is used here. The one great peculiarity of military discipline is prompt, unquestioning obedience. Wheresoever inferiors may discuss their superiors' will, or reason on the limits of obedience, or allow themselves a margin of delay, all that is mutiny in the army, and short and sharp work will be made of it, if it appear. 'Their's not to reason why,' but to do what they are bid, when they are bid, as they are bid. Their only standard of duty is their commander's will, and men have been shot as mutineers for doing grand deeds of heroism contrary to orders. The highest guerdon of courage and faithfulness is the general's praise, and men have gladly flung away their lives for a smile or a 'well done' from some Alexander or Napoleon, counting the gain far greater than the price paid.

Such an attitude towards a fellow-man makes men machines, and yet there is something in that absolute obedience and out-and-out submission to authority very noble in itself, and going a long way to ennoble even warfare. To obey may be bad or good, according to the master and the service; but obedience *is* fitting for a man, and there can be no attainment of the highest dignity, beauty, or force of character in lawless self-pleasing, but only in willing submission to a law and a lawgiver, discerned by the will to be authoritative, by the conscience to be morally good, and by the heart to be love-worthy. If, then, we can find one ruler, leader, and commander of the people, whose authority is rightfully supreme, whose commands coincide with our highest wisdom and lead to our purest felicity, to obey him must lift a life into dignity. Then we have found the secret which will make little things great, and great things small; which will dignify all life, and make the most absolute service the truest freedom, the kingliest rule.

So our text lays hold of the great central peculiarity of Christian morals, when it makes pleasing Christ to be the great, all-comprehensive aim of the Christian soldier. It is this which makes the law of morality, as re-fashioned by Christianity, altogether new and blessed. How entirely different a thing it is to give a poor, feeble, solitary man a living, loving Lord to serve and to please, and to set him down before a cold, impersonal 'ideal'; and say to him, 'There! live up to that, or it will be the worse for you.' The gospel sets forth Jesus Christ as the Pattern and Law of duty, in whom all the statuesque purity of the marble is changed into the warm, breathing flesh and blood of a brother. It sets Him forth as the power for duty, who stoops down from His height to reach forth a helping hand to us poor strugglers in the bogs at the mountain's foot, while Law but looks on with pure and icy eyes at our flounderings, and counts the splashes on our dress. It sets Him forth as the Motive for duty, who draws us to what is right by 'the cords of love and the bands of a man,' while the world's morality knows only how to appeal either to low motives of whips and pay, or to fine-spun considerations of right and obligation that melt like October's morning ice before the faintest heat of temptation. Finally, it sets Him forth as the Reward of obedience, teaching us that the true recompense of well-doing lies in pleasing Him, and that to win a smile, an 'honourable mention,' from the General, life itself would be wisely paid.

Such are the great characteristics of Christian morality. Everything clusters round a living Person. All the coldness and remoteness and powerlessness which incurably weaken all law, whether it be that of a statute-book, or of conscience, or of moralists, are changed into their very opposites. Christ is duty; Love is law. Christ is power; Christ is impulse. Christ is motive; Christ is reward. Therefore the hearts and wills that found no attraction, nor owned any constraining authority in any tables of stone or any voice of conscience or any systems of ethics, yield glad obedience to Him who makes His law love; and feeble hands are strengthened to do His will by His own power breathed into them; and the hope of recompense is freed from selfishness when its highest object is His word of praise and His look of pleasure. This, and this alone, is the morality that will work. This is the new thing in Christianity, not so much the contents of the conception of duty, though even these have been changed, but the new form in which Duty appears, in a Person who being what all men should be, is the new power for its fulfilment which He brings, and the new motive whose touch moves all our conduct.

How much more powerful this thought of pleasing Christ is, as a motive, than that of a bare Theism, needs scarcely be named. 'Thou, God, seest me'—grandly restraining and stimulating as it is, may easily become a trembling before 'the great Taskmaster's eye,' or may fade into a very dim thought of a very far-off God. But when we think that the divine eye which rests upon us wept over the sinful city, and sought the denier with the look of sorrowing reproach, untarnished by one glitter of anger, we need not fear His knowledge, nor doubt that He is as near to each of us, as glad at our obedience, and as grieved by our hardness of heart, as ever He was to the little group that lived on His smile long ago. It is no remote God whom we have to please, but our very Brother, the Captain of the Lord's host, who knows all the conditions of the fight.

The thought implies the reality of Christ's present knowledge of each of us. Who, then, is this, who is supposed to know so accurately the true characters—not only the actions, but the motives which determine the worth of the actions—of men in every age and country to the world's end? Who can exercise such an office, and be the centre of such observance, but One only? This must be God manifest in the flesh. Else it is stark nonsense for people, nineteen centuries after His death, to think of pleasing Him; and it is blasphemy worse than nonsense, to set aside all other law and commandments in order to take our duty from His life, and our reward from His approbation. But when we see in Christ the Word made flesh, then it is reasonable to believe that He knoweth the hearts of all men, and reasonable to 'labour that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.'

Such singleness of aim contributes in many ways to make life blessed and noble. It simplifies motives and aims, because, instead of being dragged hither and thither by smaller attractions, and so having our days broken up into fragments, we have one great object which can be pursued through all the variety of our occupations, making them all co-operant to one end—and there is blessedness in *that.* It lifts us above many temptations, which cease to be temptations to a heart intent on pleasing Christ, as glacial plants and animals fled to the north when cosmic changes put an end to the ice age in England. It delivers from care for men's judgment, for the opinion of the crowd matters very little to the soldier whose fame is to be praised by his commander. It gives energy for work, and turns hard, dry duty into a joy, for it is ever blessed to toil for One we love, and the work that is done with love for its motive, and with the hope of giving Him pleasure for its inspiration, will not be wearisome, though it may be long; nor grievous, though it may be hard. Freedom and dignity, and happiness and buoyancy, all flow from this one transfiguring thought, that the one all-sufficient aim for life is—pleasing Christ, the Captain of the Lord's host.

II. But our text employs a significant form of speech to designate Jesus Christ: 'Him who hath called him to be a soldier'; or as the Revised Version has it, 'enrolled him as a soldier.' And that phrase is used, I suppose, instead of the simple name, in order to bring out the reference to the great act of Christ's, on which the duty of making His pleasure our sovereign aim rests.

In old-world times when war broke out each chief would summon his clansmen to his standard and enrol them as his force. To raise a troop was the act of the leader, who then took command of the men he had raised, and did so because he had raised them. Christ has enrolled us as His soldiers, and because He has done so, he has the right of command.

Now, while there are many ways by which our Lord summons us to His service, we shall, I think, be true to the usual current of New Testament representations, if we see here mainly a reference to the great act by which He draws us to Himself. The fiery cross used to be the signal which summoned the tribesmen to the fray. So Christ's men are summoned by the Cross. His great work for us, His life of sympathy and sorrow, His death of sacrifice and shame, His resurrection of glory—these are the call which He sends out to all the world, to gather loving souls to His side whom He may honour by using as His servants and soldiers. The Cross is the magnet by which He will 'draw all men unto Him'; or in other words, the one power which will draw men away from a life of self and sin, and hearten them to fight against the evils in themselves and the world which they used to serve, is the fact of Christ's death, believed and rested on. This, and this alone, changes our tastes and makes us deserters from our old colours, to take service under a new Commander. That mighty and unspeakable proof of Love will bend our hearts to obedience when nothing else will, and the voice of endless pity for us, and awful suffering for our sake, which sounds out from Christ on the Cross, is His heart-reaching call to us all to enlist in His service. The message of the Cross is not only a message of forgiveness and blessedness for ourselves, but it is as a trumpet-note of defiance to all the powers of evil, and a call to us to take our part in the fight, which in one aspect was finished when He overcame by death, but in another will last till that far-off future day when He that is called King of kings shall ride forth, followed by all the armies of those who on earth were his soldiers, to fight the last fight, and win the final victory.

He has given Himself wholly for us, therefore He has absolute right of authority over us. Not merely because of His divine nature, not merely because, as we believe, He has been from the beginning the divine agent of all creation and of all providence, but because of His great love and of His utter and bitter sacrifice for us men, does He possess the right to their absolute obedience. His dominion is a dominion founded on suffering; the many crowns are twined round the crown of thorns, as the iron crown of Monza has for foundation a bit of iron said to be a nail of the cross beaten into a circlet, and covered now with gold and jewels. Nothing but entire self-surrender for us can warrant entire authority over us, and only He who tasted death for every man has the right to assume the captainship over men. He gave Himself for us, therefore are we to give ourselves to Him. He dies for us, and then living, turns to us with, 'Will you not serve Me?' We owe Him lives, souls—all. They are ours by the purchase of His exceeding bitter pains and death. Surely we shall not refuse His summons to service, which is also a merciful invitation to joy and blessing, but yield ourselves to the attraction of His cross and the magic of His love. Let Him take the command of your lives, and give Him all the secret springs of nature and desire to control. He has called you to be His soldiers, and your plain duty is to please Him. 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God,' and most chiefly by that chiefest mercy, the sacrifice of Christ, 'that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God.'

III. Finally, the text brings prominently forward the discipline of abstinence which this warfare requires.

In Paul's time there were no standing armies, but men were summoned from their ordinary avocations and sent into the field. When the hasty call went forth, the plough was left in the furrow, and the web in the loom; the bridegroom hurried from his bride, and the mourner from the bier. All home industries were paralysed while the manhood of the nation were in the field. That state of things suggests the language here. The word rendered 'that warreth' might be more vividly translated, as the Revised Version has it, 'on service'—the idea being that as long as a man is on a campaign, he can do nothing else but soldiering. When peace is proclaimed, he may go back to farm or merchandise; but in the field, he has but one thing to do—and that is to fight. He will scarcely win the general's good word on other terms.

What, then, is the corresponding Christian duty? Of course our text, though originally spoken in reference to Christian teachers' devotion to their work, is not to be confined to them. The sort of work which a Timothy or a Paul may have to do may be peculiar to their offices, but the spirit in which it is to be done, and the conditions of faithfulness, are the same for all doers of all sorts of work for Christ. If the apostle and the teacher need non-entanglement 'with the affairs of this life,' all Christians need it just as much.

Now it is to be noticed that the parallel of the soldier on service and the Christian in *his* warfare fails in this one respect: that the soldier had to abandon entirely all other occupation, even the most needful and praiseworthy, because he could not both do them and fight; but the abandonment of the affairs of this life is not necessary for us, because occupation with them is not incompatible with our Christian warfare. Nay, so far from that, these 'affairs' furnish the very fields on which a large part of that warfare is to be waged. If these are abandoned, what is left to fight about? What is our Christian warfare but the constant struggle with evil in ourselves and temptation in the world; the constant effort to bring all the activities of our spirits and hands under the power of Christ's law, and to yield our whole selves, in heart, mind, will, and deed, to Him? How then can that warfare be waged, and that ennobling self-surrender achieved, but by the heroic, patient effort to deal with all the affairs of this life in a Christ-like temper, and to Christ-pleasing ends? The Christian who abandons any of these is much liker the frightened deserter who runs from his post, and may expect a stern rebuke, if nothing worse, than the faithful soldier, whose face will one day brighten beneath the smile of his chief.

We must put stress on that word 'entangled,' if we would rightly understand this saying. It is not occupation with the things of life, but entanglement in them, that is fatal to the possibility of pleasing the King. The metaphor is plain enough, and vivid enough. As some poor struggling fish in the meshes of a net vainly beats its silver scales off, and gasps out its life, and swims no more in the free deep; or as some panting forest creature is checked in its joyous bounding, and, tangled in the half-seen snares, only tightens the cords by its wild plunging; or as some strong swimmer is caught in the long, brown seaweed which clings to his limbs till it drags him under and drowns; so men are snared and caught and strangled by these multitudinous cords and filaments of earthly things. The fate of Jonah befalls many a professing

Christian, who, if he knew what had really come to him, might cry with him, 'The weeds are wrapped about my head.'

We are not bound to abandon the affairs of this life, but we *are* called upon to prevent their interfering with our warfare. If we are caught in the thicket whilst we are pressing on to the fight, out with the billhooks and hew it down. It may be full of pretty peeps, where there are shade and singing-birds; but if it stands in our way, it has to be grubbed up. 'If thy right eye cause thee to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for thee.'

And that interference can easily be detected, if we honestly wish to do so. Does a certain thing—some legitimate, or even praiseworthy occupation, or possession, the exercise of some taste or accomplishment, some recreation, some companionship—clog my feet when I ought to march; clip my wings when I ought to soar; dim my eyes when I ought to gaze on God? Then no matter what others may do about it, my plain duty is to give it up. It is entangling me. It is interfering with my warfare, and I must cut the cords. I can only do so by entire abstinence. Perhaps I may get stronger some day, and be able to use it as not abusing it; but I cannot venture on that at present. So go it must. I judge nobody else, but whoever may be able to retain that thing, whatever it be, without slackening hold on Christ, I cannot.

So, brethren, if you find that legitimate occupation and affairs are absorbing your interests, and interfering with your clear vision of God, and making you less inclined and less apt to high thoughts and noble purposes, to lowly service and to Christ-like life, your safety lies in at once shaking off the venomous beast that has fastened on you into the fire. Unless the occupation be a plain duty, a post where the Captain has set you as sentry, and which it would be flat disobedience to forsake, leave it at any cost, if you would kept your Christian integrity.

But if you have to stand to your post, perilous though it be, lift your heart to Him who can neutralise the poison, and who will so pour health into the veins of His servants, that, in the execution of His commands, 'they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them.' The affairs of this life must not entangle us; that is the one indispensable condition to pleasing Him. That they may not, they must always be rigidly subordinated, and used as helps to our higher life. Sometimes, when they cannot be so used, they must be abandoned altogether. Each must settle that for himself. Only let us make it our one great purpose in life that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him; and that single, lofty motive will breathe unity into our life, and giving us clear, sure insight into good and evil, will instruct us, by the instinct of hearts and wills tuned to harmony to His, to shun the evil and cleave strenuously to the good. So living, ever looking to His face to catch His smile as our highest reward, it will not be hard to give up anything that hinders the light of His countenance shining upon us. So surrendering, we may hope to be His obedient, and therefore in highest reality, His victorious soldiers. So fighting, we may possess in our hearts the assurance that His wonderful mercy accepts even our poor service as well-pleasing in His sight, and may lay ourselves down in peace on the field where we seem to ourselves to have borne ourselves so badly and been so often beaten, with the wondrous hope to keep us company in the grave, that when the triumph comes, and our King goes up as conqueror, we, even we, shall follow, and receive from His lips the praise, and from His face the smile, which make the highest heaven of reward for all Christ's soldiers.

A FAITHFUL GOD

'He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself.'—2 TIM. ii. 13.

I HAVE chosen this text, not as intending to deal with it only, so much as with the great thought to which it gives such emphatic expression. The faithfulness of God is a familiar enough phrase, but I suspect that the depth and scope of the thought are not as familiar as the words. It is employed in Scripture in many ways, and with many different applications of exhortation and encouragement. Like a prism held at right angles to the light, the thought flashes out different tints according as the rays impinge upon it. It is a favourite with Paul. He speaks it in his very first letter, and here, in his last, after a lifetime spent in testing God, he comes back to it. He had proved it in a thousand dangers and struggles, and now, when he has all but done with earth, he 'sets to his seal that God is true.' But all the other New Testament writers employ the expression likewise, and I have thought that it may be profitable to gather together the various aspects and applications of this great truth in Scripture, and so to draw out, if we may, some of the lofty thoughts and treasures of strength and hope which are shrined in it.

I. Let me ask the question what the faithfulness of God means.

Now when we speak of one another as 'faithful,' we mean that we adhere to our word; that we keep faith with men, that we discharge the obligations of our office or position, and that so we are trustworthy. We mean just the same things when we speak about the faithful God.

I suppose that the first thought that occurs to most of us when God is called faithful is that it means that He keeps His promise. That, of course, is included in the idea, but it is very noteworthy that this, which to most of us is the only meaning of the expression, is rarely its meaning in the New Testament. Out of all the cases in which the phrase occurs it only twice has reference to God's fulfilment of His spoken words; and these two instances both occur in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where we read: 'He is faithful that promised,' and 'She judged Him faithful that promised.' Now it is a great truth that out of the darkness God has spoken; that, like some constitutional monarch, He has declared the principles of His government, and so has bound Himself by articulate expressions to follow out these in His dealings. He is not a despot; He is a King who has laid down the law to which He Himself will adhere. His promises hang out over the troubled stream of life, like boughs from the trees on the bank, for His half-drowned children to grasp at and to hold by.

But great as that thought of our God's fulfilment of His every word is, it does not go half way down to the depths of meaning in the New Testament use of the expression 'the faithful God.' For my text witnesses to a deeper meaning. 'He cannot *deny Himself*.' That is Paul's notion of the faithfulness of God; that His nature and character constitute for Him, if I may so say, a solemn obligation; that He is His own law; that He is bound by what He is, and that He never can be, in the smallest degree, anything contradictory to, or falling beneath, the level of His own equable, consistent, and uniform Self. As God, He must be true to the character of goodness and wisdom which the very name of God brings with it. *We* drop below our best selves; contradictory impulses and thoughts fight in our nature; the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. No man is always himself; God is always *Himself*. We are like the little brooks that are dried in drought and swelled in spate, are parched in summer and frozen in winter, but this great river is always bank-full, and always clear and always flowing. This ocean is tideless and has no ebb or flood; and you can look down into its deepest depths, and as far as the vision of the eye can go, all is clear and pure, and where vision fails, it is not that the ocean is dark but that the sense is limited. So John says, in his infantile-angelic way, with a simplicity that is sublime, 'God is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all.' The sun has spots; it has, as astronomers tell us, a photosphere, an envelope that gives light, but possibly its core is black and dark. But that is not so with the true Light. 'God is faithful; He cannot deny Himself.'

Then there is another deep thought in the word which is recurrent in the various applications of the expression throughout the New Testament—that God's faithfulness implies that He is true, not only to His words, not only to Himself, but also to the trend and drift, so to speak, of His past acts. That thought is applied in the New Testament in two different ways. Peter says to the troubled disciples to whom he was writing, 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.' The fact of having made creatures binds God to certain obligations in regard to them, and He will discharge them. The other application of the idea of God's faithfulness is in reference to His past acts bearing on man's redemption. We find verses like these: 'Faithful is He that calleth you'; 'God is faithful by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son.' The thought there is that, by the fact of His redeeming work, God has come under certain obligations to the persons who yield to the invitation that is wrapped up in the message and gifts of Christ and of Christ's Spirit, and that He will faithfully discharge these.

II. Now, then, carry these three simple thoughts with you—faithful to His word, faithful to Himself, faithful to His past—and let us ask, in the second place, what does this faithfulness guarantee?

What does His faithfulness as Creator guarantee to the creature whom He has made?

It guarantees, first, that the faithful Creator will care for His creature's well-being. Creation is not merely a work of power, nor merely a necessary process, as some people seem to think. It is the outcome of the love of God, and so the wise psalmist says, 'To Him that made great lights; *for* His mercy endureth for ever.' He came forth, and poured Himself, as it were, into beings because His name is Love, and having thus created, He recognises the obligations under which He has thereby come. The smallest microscopic animal, because it has the mysterious gift of life, has a claim on God; and He is bound—I was going to say to do His utmost, but all that He does is His utmost—to care for that creature's well-being. The birds lay their eggs, and hatch their young, and then let these go as they will. Men sometimes forget the duties of parents and the responsibilities that are involved therein; but God the Creator lets us plead His faithfulness with Him, and turn round to Him and say, 'Thou hast made me; therefore I bring in my hand Thine own bill, with Thine own name to it. Pay it, O God!' 'Commit the keeping of your souls to Him as to a faithful Creator.'

Especially does this conception of His faithfulness to His past in creation guarantee to us that all desires implanted by Him will be satisfied, and all needs created by Him will be supplied. Our wishes, when they are right, are prophecies of our possessions. God has put no craving in a man's heart which He does not mean to fill. Remember the homely old proverb: 'He never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them.' And if in thy heart there are longings which thou knowest are not sinful, be sure that these are veiled prophets of a divine gift. All these necessities of ours, all these hungry desires, all these sometimes painful thirsts of the soul that we try to slake at muddy and broken cisterns—all these are meant to take us straight to God. They are like the long indentations of the coast on our western shores, openings by which the flashing waters may run far inland and bathe the roots of the everlasting hills. So when God gives us a desire, He binds Himself to fulfil it. The world is a bewildering and unanswerable riddle and mystery, and human life is one long misery, unless we believe and know that because He is the faithful Creator no man need hunger with a ravening desire after food that is not provided, nor need any man thirst with a thirst that there is no water anywhere to slake.

Again, his great thought of the divine faithfulness as Creator guarantees that our tasks shall be proportioned to our strength. So Paul uses the thought in one tender sentence, when he says 'God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.' Or as the psalmist has it in his sweet words, 'He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.' Nothing above our power will ever be laid upon us. Careless and cruel drivers load their horses beyond their strength, and the patient drudge pulls until it drops. Unwise engineers put too much pressure on their boilers, or try to get too much work out of their engine. But God knows how much pressure the hearts that He makes can stand, and what is the utmost weight of the load that we can lift; and He will not be less merciful and faithful to His creatures than is the merciful man to his beast. He is the faithful Creator who recognises His obligations to care for the works of His own hands, who will satisfy their desires, and supply the needs that He has made, who will shape their burdens according to the strength of their shoulders.

And if we turn to the other side of the thought, and ask what is guaranteed by God's calling of us in Christ Jesus, then we get three answers.

The first thing that is guaranteed is forgiveness. The Apostle John, in words that are often misunderstood, grasps the thought of God's faithfulness in this application when he says, 'He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' Since Christ has come, and has died in order that men might be pardoned and cleansed, God's faithfulness is implicated in God's pardoning mercy; and He would neither be faithful to His promises, nor to His past act in Christ's mission, nor to the invitation and call that He has sounded in our ears, unless, when we obeyed that call, we entered into the full possession of His pardoning grace. So the gentle, tender attribute of Mercy becomes solemn, and stately, and eternal, when it is regarded as the outcome of His faithfulness. In some tropical forests you will find strong tree-trunks out of which spring the most radiant and ethereal-looking blossoms. So the fair flower of forgiving mercy springs from the steadfast bole of the divine faithfulness. He is 'Just, and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus.'

Again, God's faithfulness guarantees the progressive perfecting of Christian character. That is the application of the thought which is most frequent in Paul's letters. We find it, for instance, in the passage where the prayer that the saints in Thessalonica might be 'preserved, body, soul, and spirit, blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus,' is, by the Apostle, based on the words 'faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it.' And a similar collocation of ideas is found in other passages, which I need not quote to you now. The progressive perfecting of the Christian life is guaranteed by the thought of the faithfulness of God. He does not begin a work and then get disgusted with it, or turn to something else, or find that His resources will not avail to work it out to completion. That is how we do. He never stops till He ends. As the prophet says about another matter, 'His hands have laid the foundation of the house; His hands shall also finish it.'

I remember a place on our coasts where some man, who had not calculated his resources, nor the strength of the ocean, began to build a breakwater and seawalls, and to-day the blocks of dislodged concrete are lying in wild confusion on the beach, and the victorious waves break over them at every tide, and laugh at the abortive design. None that look on God's work will ever have the right to say, 'This man began to build, and was not able to finish.' There are no half-completed failures in God's workshop. Only you have to keep yourself under His influences. It is useless to talk about the 'final perseverance of the saints,' unless you remember that only they who continuously yield themselves to God are continuously the subjects of His cleansing and hallowing grace. If they do, the progressive perfecting of those upon whom He has begun to work is sure. Like some patient artist, He lays touch upon touch on the canvas, or smites piece after piece off the marble, till the ideal is realised, and stands there before Him. Like some patient seamstress, He works needleful after needleful of varying colours of silk on the tapestry, until the whole pattern is accomplished. 'He is faithful; He also will do it.'

But again, that conception of the divine faithfulness guarantees ultimate blessedness. That thought is always taken in connection with the preceding one, in the various passages to which reference has just been made. Paul says in another place, basing his assurance on the same thought of the divine faithfulness; 'He will confirm you unto the day of the Lord Jesus.' And so we have to think that just because God is faithful, therefore the Christian life here on earth, because it is so much and because it is so little, because of its devotion and because of its selfishness, bears in itself the prophecy of a time when all that is here checked tendency shall become triumphant realisation; and when the plant that here was an exotic, and did put forth buds, though poor and pale compared with what it would give in its natural soil, shall be transplanted into the higher house, and there shall blossom for evermore. God is a liar unless heaven is to complete the experiences of earth. If these poor natures of ours at their best here were all that Christ had won by the travail of His soul, do you think He would be satisfied? Certainly not. We need heaven to vindicate the faithfulness of God.

III. And now one word is all that I can spare on what I meant to make the last point of my sermon, and that is, what attitude in us corresponds to the faithfulness of God?

I need only quote one of the expressions in the Epistle to the Hebrews to give the answer, 'Hold fast the profession of your faith without wavering, for He is faithful that promised.' Our faith corresponds with and is the answer to God's faithfulness. As with two instruments tuned to the same pitch, when a note is struck on the one, the chords of the other vibrate it back again, so God's faithfulness should awake the music of answering faith in our responsive and vibrating hearts. If He is worth trusting let us trust Him.

But, further, unwavering faith is the only thing that truly corresponds to unchanging faithfulness. Build rock upon rock, and since He is faithful, do not answer his steadfast faithfulness with a tremulous and vacillating confidence. What would you think of a man that had given to him some magnificent site on which to rear a fortress; some impregnable crag which he might crown with a sure defence; if, on the top of it, instead of rearing granite walls that might match their foundation, he should run up some hasty shelter of lath and plaster, or of fluttering canvas, and so think that he had adorned, when he had insulted the rock on which he built. Make your faith to match God's faithfulness, and 'commit the keeping of your souls to Him in welldoing, as unto a faithful Creator,' leaving all things in His hands, and trusting them absolutely unto Him.

Imitate the faithfulness in such fashion as you may. Paul in one place says, 'As God is faithful, our word to you was not yea and nay.' It does not become a man who is trusting to the faithful God to be shifty and unreliable in his own utterances and manifestations to men.

Let us turn away from the illusions of vain hope, from all doubtful refuges, from all the fleeting defences and treasures that earth can give. Why should we build upon a sandbank when we can build on the Rock of Ages? Why should we trust mere wealth, creatural love, success, to do for us what only the faithful God can do? All these deceive or betray or fail or pass. They are unworthy of trust. 'God is faithful'; Christ is 'the faithful and true witness.' 'This is the faithful saying . . . that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' If we will join ourselves to the faithful God and accept the faithful saying of His faithful witness, our hearts will be calm, our lives will be steadied, we shall be delivered from the misery of leaning on props which, like rotten branches, break beneath our weight. On earth we shall attain growing completeness, and shall pass thence to that perfecting in the day of the Lord Jesus which the faithful God, by His words, by His great redeeming act, and by His present workings on us, has bound Himself to give us. There we may hope to hear the wondrous welcome, which points to our assimilation to Him in whom we trust: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

THE FOUNDATION AND THE SEAL

'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'—2 Tim. ii. 19.

There was a great deal in the Apostle Paul's last days to excuse despondency and sadness. For himself he was poor, and a prisoner, lonely and old, looking forward to the near approach of a bloody death. For the gospel and the Church the outlook was black too. Evil had already begun to lift its head, and was threatening to increase. So this, his last letter, is full of gloomy vaticinations, but in it there is none of the pessimism that belongs to old people, none of the despondency which so often seizes upon leaders of thought and action when they come to the end of their lives, and see how little they have done, and how threateningly the clouds are gathering. But throughout, side by side with the clearest perception of evil symptoms and growing dangers, there is unconquerable confidence.

This text is a remarkable illustration of that. He has just been speaking about errors that are threatening to flood the Church, and he speaks with very grave and vehement words. And then all at once with this 'nevertheless' he, as it were, swings right round, and his whole soul leaps up in the glad confidence that, whatever may happen, and whatever has to be abandoned, and whoever may go away, 'the foundation of God stands sure.' So he heartens up his young brother Timothy, who seems to have been of a great deal softer stuff than the old man, and bids him be of good cheer and quit himself like a man.

The words of my text, then, seem to me to be very precious to us in regard to the widest interests of Christianity, and in regard to our own individual standing, especially in times like those in which our lot is cast; times of transition, when a great deal is going that past generations used to think sacred, and a great many timid people are trembling for the Ark of God; and a great many old people like me are thinking that the old gospel is in danger of passing away from the face of the earth. 'Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure.' So let me just say a word or two about this text.

I. Look at this joyous confidence of the old man, side by side with the clearest perceptions of encircling dangers.

The 'foundation,' in the New Testament, is generally Jesus Christ Himself. Here the metaphor is used in a somewhat different fashion. The 'foundation' in the present case is not a part of a building, but the whole building, conceived of as being founded by God. 'The foundation of God' is, in other words, that which is founded by God—that is to say, the whole house, whatever that may be, which he himself has 'established on the tops of the mountains.' And you will find that that explanation is borne out by the fact that in the very next verse the Apostle speaks about 'the house,' which he also meant when he spoke of the foundation of God. Of course that 'house' is, in one aspect, the Church, but the Church not as a mere institution or external organisation, but as being the witness to the gospel. It is that, and the Christ who is the gospel, which stands firm, whatever may happen. There is a great deal of idolatry of the Church. What makes it precious, and what makes it eternal, is the message that is committed to its charge.

Now it seems to me to be of very prime importance that this joyous confidence, calm and assured, should be the habitual temper of us all. The more distinctly and clearly we apprehend, and the more painfully we feel the perils, the imperfections, and the threatening errors of the present, the more should we take our stand upon this one truth, that what God has founded is indestructible, and, standing there, we may look all round the three hundred and sixty degrees of the horizon, and no matter what formidable dangers may arise, and hurry across, darkening the sea like the thunder-clouds in the heavens, we may be sure that no tempest can break which will damage the ship that carries Christ and His fortunes. Man may go, 'nevertheless'; errors may arise, 'nevertheless'; Churches, individuals, may become unfaithful, 'nevertheless'; candlesticks may be removed, lights quenched, communities may be honeycombed by worldliness, the salt may lose its savour, 'nevertheless that which is founded by God stands sure.' The history of the past tells us that. Why, it is the miracle of miracles that Christian people having been what they have been, and being what they are, the Church of God has not been annihilated long, long ago. Why is it? Only because that which it bears and He who is in it are indestructible, and whilst the envelope may be changed, the central Truth and the living Person who is in the Church, in spite of all its corruptions and infirmities, cannot die, nor be suppressed nor removed.

So, brethren, standing firmly as we may upon this rock of a Church indestructible, because of the immortal Christ who is in it and the eternal gospel which is committed to it, it does not become us to have our hearts in our mouths at every change that may be passing, and that must necessarily pass, upon the external organisation, which is subject, like other institutions, to time and change. What can go, let it go. It is the dead leaves that are blown off the trees. Men make breakwaters with endless pains, and deposit great blocks of concrete that they think will fling back the wildest waves in vain spray, and a winter storm comes, and one wave puts out its tongue and licks up the whole structure, and it is a mass of ruins. Yes; and the same storm that smashed the breakwater runs up harmlessly on the humble sand which God has made to be His breakwater, and which has the power to say to the wildest tempest: 'Here shall thy proud waves be stayed.' Much may go, 'nevertheless the foundation of God stands sure.' So do not be frightened out of your wits—that is to say, out of your confidence—by 'higher criticism' and 'advanced views,' and right-hand defections and left-hand corruptions, and the failures of communities that call themselves churches to live up to the height of their responsibilities, or at the approach of new ways of looking at old truths. And do not fancy that because the cart that carries the ark jogs, and the oxen stumble, there is any harm coming to the ark. 'The foundation of God standeth sure.' So let us welcome change of all that is human in the doctrine, and polity, and practice of God's Church, and never mind what becomes of men-made creeds, and men-made ceremonies, and men-made churches. What is of God will stand. Let us be glad when 'the things that can be shaken' are 'removed,' that 'the things which cannot be shaken' may stand all the more firmly.

II. Notice **here the divine side of the guarantee of this confidence.**

'The firm foundation of God stands'; and then the Apostle goes on, in a very picturesque fashion, 'having this seal.' That is a mixture of metaphors which makes a rhetorician's hair stand on end. Paul does not mind about mingling metaphors. You cannot very well seal a foundation, but the idea in his mind is that of the confirmation, the guarantee, the pledge of the confidence that he has just been expressing. He goes on to expand the metaphor. The seal has two inscriptions on it, like the obverse and reverse of a coin, or like two sentences which might be written on the two lintels of a door. The one gives the divine and the other the human sides of the guarantee.

As for the former, the divine, it is, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.' 'The Lord' here is, I take it, Christ. And what is the guarantee that is contained in these words? If you seek for the explanation of that phrase in its deepest, most blessed, most courage-giving sense, listen to diviner words than Paul's. 'I know My sheep, and am known of Mine, as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father.' That knowledge is not the mere divine attribute of omniscience, which may have in it consolation, or may not, but it is something far more tender, close, gracious, and strength-giving than the bare thought of an all-seeing eye. The 'knowledge' which Jesus has of His sheep is a knowledge based upon, and perfected in, closest love and tenderest sympathy, and of which that ineffable communion from the depths of eternity, in which the Father knoweth the Son, and the Son knoweth the Father, and the two knowledges intertwine and interflow into one sacred, and, to us, inconceivable bond, is the example. Thus close, though we cannot say so close; thus tender, though we cannot say so tender; thus loving, though we cannot say so loving, is the bond of that knowledge which unites Jesus Christ to every soul that belongs to Him. And with that guarantee of a knowledge which means the closest union that is possible, the individuality of the two united persons being preserved, surely there comes, floated, as it were, like some precious treasure in a cedar ark upon the surface of that ocean of divine knowledge, the assurance that such a knowledge will guard against all evil and all danger its peaceful and happy objects. If the Lord thus 'knows them that are His,' the knowledge will be a wall of fire round about them, as well as a glory in the midst of them.

That knowledge means, then, protection and care. He will not lose what belongs to Him. He is not such a careless Owner as that a sheep may stray out of the fold and the Shepherd never notice it. He is not such a careless Householder as that from His purse there may drop, and into some dusty corner may roll away, a coin, and He not know that He has lost one of the pieces. He is not such a heartless Brother as that the younger brother may go away into the far-off land and there be starving, and the Brother's heart at home have no pangs and no sense of separation. But He 'knows them that are His,' and, knowing them, He holds them with the grip of tenacious possession as well as of tender love.

So there is the deep, the sure, the divine guarantee that the foundation standeth firm. So, brethren, it is wise for us to look at the dangers, to be fully aware of the perils, to be tremblingly conscious of our own weakness, but it is folly and faithlessness to look at the danger so exclusively, or to feel our own weakness so keenly as that either one or the other, or both of them combined, shall obscure to our sight the far greater and confidence-giving truth of the knowledge, the sympathy, and the extended protecting hand, of our Brother and our Lord. We belong to Him if we have yielded our hearts to Him, and He will not 'suffer His Holy One to see corruption,' here or hereafter. If you look down from the narrow ledge of the Alpine *arrête* to the thousand feet of precipice on either side of the two or three inches where you have your footing you will get giddy and fall. If you look up you will walk steadily. Do not ignore the danger, nor presumptuously forget your own weakness, but remember 'when I said my foot slippeth Thy mercy held me up.' Recognise the slippery ice and the feeble foot, and couple with them the other thought, 'The Lord knoweth them that are His.'

III. Now, lastly, here we have the human side of the guarantee.

The reverse of the coin, the other side of the foundation bears, deep-cut, this inscription: 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity,' and the two inscriptions are always to be held together. Look how they fit one another. The one is a promise; the other is a commandment. The one says a deep thing about God; the other says a plain thing about us. It is of no use going up into the heights of 'the Lord knoweth them that are His,' unless you also come down to the simple teaching, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.' The Jews believed the first of these two inscriptions, and it was all their religion; look what wild work it made of them and their morality, and their whole nation. There have been plenty of Christian people who have been so absorbed in the contemplation of 'unconditional election,' 'eternal predestination,' 'final perseverance,' and all the rest of the theological formularies that have been spun out of these words, that they have forgotten the other side altogether. And so there has been licence, and a presumptuous building upon a supposed past; there has been a contempt for the 'outsiders,' and the driving of a coach and six through the plainest teachings of common righteousness and morality. And the only way to keep 'the Lord knoweth them that are His' from being a minister of sin is, in the same breath, to say, 'Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.'

To name the Name of Christ is the same as to say that you are His. And if you are, the best proof that you do belong to Jesus Christ is your living the life of plain, practical righteousness, and putting away from yourself everything that is evil. People talk about looking into themselves for evidences of their being 'saved,' as they say. I would rather take your neighbour's opinion as to whether you are saved or not than yours; and you will be far more likely to come to the possession of calm assurance that you do belong to Jesus Christ, if your assurance is based upon this, 'I am living as He would have me to do.' That is the infallible sign that you are His. That homely, pedestrian righteousness, down amongst the commonplaces of daily life, and the little things of it, that, and not emotions, however soaring; not aspirations, however ardent; not the consciousness of communion apart, however deep and sweet, is the sign that we are Christ's. However necessary all these things are, still they are necessary mainly as means to an end, and the end of all the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and of all these joys and experiences of the individual Christian soul, is to make us live righteously, soberly, godly, in this present world. And the more we do thus live, the more we shall get, not only the consciousness of belonging to Jesus Christ, but the help by which we shall be able to stand.

So, dear brethren, my one last word to you is, hold these two things ever together in your minds and thoughts. 'What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.' You have a right to be confident, because, far deeper than, and prior to, anything that you do, there are the knowledge, the love, the sympathy, and the outstretched hand of the loving and upholding Saviour. But you have only the right to the confidence based upon his knowledge of you, if that confidence is working in you a departing from iniquity. If you know that you are trying, in your poor way, to do that, and that you are trying to do it for His sake, and because you think that you are His, then, whatever may happen to others, whatever may befall some of the outworks of your faith or belief, whatever changes may impend, you may be sure of this, that 'the foundation of God standeth sure,' and that, weak as we are, building upon Him who is the foundation, we shall be able to resist all the assaults of evil.

Only remember, that Christ Himself has told us that many would come to Him and say, 'Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name done many wonderful works?' And He will say unto them, 'Depart from Me, I never knew you,' and the proof that He never did is that He has to address them as 'Ye that work iniquity.'

THE GREAT HOUSE AND ITS VESSELS

'But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. 21. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.'—2 Tim. ii. 20, 21.

Our text begins with a 'but.' It, therefore, suggests something which may seem to contradict or to modify what has gone before. The Apostle has been speaking about what he calls the 'foundation of God,' or the building founded by God, whereby he means the Church. He has been expressing triumphant confidence that, as thus founded, it is indestructible, whatever dangers may threaten or defections may weaken it. But the very contemplation of that grand ideal suggests darker thoughts. He carries on his metaphor, for the 'great house' is suggested by 'the foundation of God,' and yet the two things do not refer to precisely the same object. The building founded by God which stands fast, whatever happens, is what we call in our abstract way, the 'invisible Church,' the ideal community or aggregate of all who are truly joined to Jesus Christ. The great house is what we call the visible Church, the organisation, institution, or institutions comprising those who profess to be thus joined. The one is indestructible, as founded by God; the other is not, being made by men, and composed of heterogeneous elements.

This heterogeneousness of its elements is suggested by the further metaphor, of the vessels of different materials, value, and use. The members of the Church are the various vessels. When we come down from the heights of ideal contemplation to face the reality of the Church as an organisation in the world, we are confronted with this grave fact, that its members are some of them 'gold and silver,' some of them 'wood' and 'earth.' And that fact modifies the triumphant confidence already uttered, and imposes upon us all very plain duties. So I wish to look now at the three things that are suggested to me here. First, a grave fact as to the actual condition of the Church as an organised institution; second, an inspiring possibility open to us all; and, lastly, a plain direction as to the way by which the possibility may become a reality.

I. Then we have here a grave fact as to the actual condition of the Church as an organised institution.

'In a great house there are vessels of gold and silver.' There they stand, ranged on some *buffet*, precious and sparkling, and taken care of; and away down in kitchens or sculleries there are vessels of wood, or of cheap common crockery and pottery. Now, says Paul, that is like the Church as we have to see it in the world. What is the principle of the distinction here? At first sight one might suppose that it refers to the obvious inequality of intellectual and spiritual and other gifts or graces bestowed upon men; that the gold and silver are the more brilliantly endowed in the Christian community, and the wood and the earth are humbler members who have less conspicuous and less useful service to perform. But that is not so. The Bible never recognises that distinction which the world makes so much of, between the largely and slenderly endowed, between the men who do what are supposed to be great things, and those who have to be content with humbler service. Its principle is, 'small service is true service whilst it lasts,' and although there are diversities of operation, the man who has the largest share of gifts stands, in Heaven's estimate, no whit above the man who has the smallest. All are on the one level: in God's great army the praise and the honours do not get monopolised by the general officers, but they come down to the privates just as abundantly, if they are equally faithful.

And then another consideration which shows us that it will not do to take gold and silver on the one hand, and wood and earth on the other, as marking the cleavage between the largely and the slenderly endowed members of the Church, is the fact that the way to get out of the one class and into the other, as we shall have to see presently, is by moral purity and not by the increase of intellectual or other endowments. The man that cleanses himself comes out of the category of 'wood' and 'earth,' and passes into that of 'gold and silver.' Thus the basis of the distinction, the ground of classification, lies altogether in goodness or badness, purity or impurity, worthiness or unworthiness. They who are in the highest degree pure are the 'gold and silver.' They who are less so, or not at all so, are the 'wooden' and the 'earthen' vessels. The same line of demarcation is suggested in another passage which employs several of the same phrases and ideas that are found in my text. We read in it about the foundation which is laid, and about the teachers building upon it various elements. Now these elements, on the one hand 'gold, silver, and precious stones,' and on the other hand 'wool, hay, and stubble,' may be the doctrines that these teachers proclaimed, or perhaps they may be the converts that they brought in. But in any case notice the parallelism, not only in regard to the foundation, but in regard to the distinction of the component parts of the structure—'gold and silver,' as here, and the less valuable list headed, as here, by 'wood,' and then, by reason of the divergence of the metaphor, 'hay and stubble,' in the one case, and 'earthenware' in the other. But the suggestion of both passages is that the Church, the visible institution, has in it, and will always have in it, those who, by their purity and consistency of Christian life, answer to the designation of the gold and the silver, and those who, by their lack of that, fall into the other class, of wooden and earthen vessels.

Of course it must be so. 'What act is all its thought had been?' Every ideal, when it becomes embodied in an institution, becomes degraded; just as, when you expose quicksilver to the air, a non-transparent film and scum creeps across the surface. The 'drag-net' in one of Christ's parables suggests the same idea. There are no meshes that ever man's knitting-needle has formed that are fine enough to keep out the bad, as the Church necessarily includes both sets of people.

I do not need to dwell upon the question as to whether in these least worthy members of that community are included people that have some faint flickering light of God in their hearts, real though very imperfect Christians, or whether it means only those who are nominally, and not at all really, joined to the Lord. The parting lines between these two classes are very evanescent and very slight; and it is scarcely worth while calling them two classes at all. But only let me remind you that this recognition of the necessary intermingling of unworthy and worthy professors in every Christian Church is no reason for us Nonconformists departing from our fundamental principle that we should try to keep Christ's Church clear, as far as may be, of the intrusion of unworthy members. The Apostle is not speaking about the conditions that ought to be imposed as precedent to connection with the visible Church, but he is speaking about the evil, whatever the conditions may be, that is sure to attach to it. It attaches to *this* community of ours here, which, in accordance with New Testament usage, we have no hesitation in calling a Church. We try to keep our communion pure; we do not succeed; we never shall succeed. That is no reason why we should give up trying. But in this little house there are 'vessels of gold and silver,' and 'vessels of wood and earth, and some to honour and some to dishonour.'

But whilst this necessity is no reason for indiscriminate admission of all manner of people into the Christian Church, it is a reason for you that are in it not to make so much as some of you do of the fact that you are in, and not to trust, as some of you do, to the mere nominal, external connection with the 'great house.' You may be in it, but you may be down in the back premises, and one of the vessels that have no honourable use. Lay that to heart, dear friends. It is not for me to apply general principles to individual cases, but I may venture to say that, like every true pastor of a Christian community, I cannot help seeing that there are names of people on our rolls who have a name to live and are dead.

II. Now, secondly, here we have an inspiring possibility open to us all.

On certain conditions any man may be 'a vessel unto honour,' by which, of course, is meant that the vessel—that is to say, the man—gets honour.

And how does he get it? By service. If you will look at the passage carefully, you will see that after this general designation of 'a vessel unto honour,' there follow three characteristics of the vessel, which taken together make its honour. I shall speak about them in detail presently, but in the meantime let me point out how here there is embodied the great principle of the New Testament that the true honour is service. 'It shall not be so among you; he that is chief amongst you let him be your servant.' Just as Jesus Christ, 'knowing that He came from God and went to God, and that the Father had given all things into His hand, laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciples' feet,' so we, if we desire honour and prominence, must find it in service; and if we have by God's gift, and the concurrence of circumstances, possessions or resources of mind, body, or estate, which make us prominent and above our brethren, we are thereby the more bound to utilise all that we have, and all that we are, for His service. If a man is ambitious let him remember this that service is honour, use is dignity, and there are none other.

But now turn for a moment to these three characteristics which are here set forth as constituting the honour of the vessels of gold and silver. The first is 'sanctified,' or as it might perhaps better be expressed, consecrated. For, as I suppose many of us know, the root-idea of sanctification or holiness is not the moral purity which goes along with the expression in our thoughts, but that which is the root of all evangelical purity—viz., the *yielding* of ourselves to God. Consecration is the beginning of purity, and consecration is honour. No man stands higher, in the true Legion of Honour of the Heavens, than he who bears on his breast and in his heart, not a knot of ribbon, but the imprint of a bloody Cross, and for the sake of that yields himself, body, soul, and spirit to God's service. The vessels that are devoted are the sacrificial vessels of the Temple, which are sacred beyond the golden cups of household use, and yet the commonest domestic utensils may become honourable by virtue of their being thus consecrated. So one of the old prophets, using the same metaphor as my text, with a slightly different application, says that in the day when the Kingdom of God assumes its perfect form upon earth, every pot in Jerusalem shall be as the bowls of the altar, and on the very horse-bells shall be written, 'Consecrated to the Lord.' The vessel unto honour must be sanctified.

Then again, 'meet for the master's use.' On the great *buffet* in the banqueting hall, the cup in the centre, that belongs to the householder, and is lifted to his glowing lips, is the most honourable of all. Every Christian man amongst us may be used by the Christ, and may—more wonderful still!—be useful to Christ. That is condescension, is it not? You remember how, when He would, in modest prophetic pomp, once for all assert in public His claim to be the King of Israel, He sent two of His servants 'into the village over against' them with this message, 'The Lord hath need of him,' the humble ass. Jesus Christ needs you to carry out His purposes, to be His representatives and the executors of His will, His viceroys and servants in this world. And there is no honour higher than that I, for all my imperfections and limitations, with all my waywardness and slothfulness, should yet be taken by Him, and made use of by Him. Brother! have you any ambition to be used by Jesus, and to be useful to Jesus? And are you of any use to Him? Have you ever been? The questions are for our own hearts, in the privacy of communion with God. I leave them with you.

'Ready for every good work.' The habit of service will grow. A man that is consecrated, and being used by Jesus Christ, will become more and more useful all round. It ought to be our ambition to be men-of-all-work to our Lord. There is great danger of our all yielding to natural limitations, as we suppose them, and confining ourselves to what we take to be our rôle. It is all right that that should be the prominent part of our ministry in the world. But let us beware of the limitations and the onesidedness that attaches to us, and be ready for the distasteful work, for the uncongenial work, for the work to which our natural fastidiousness and temperaments do *not* call us. Let us, as I say, try to be many-sided, and to stand with our loins girt and our lamps burning, and our wills held well down, and say 'Lord! what wouldst Thou have me to do? Here am I; send me.'

III. Now a word about the last point that is here, and that is the plain direction as to the way in which this possibility may become a reality for us all.

'If a man purge himself from these.' These; whom? The 'vessels to dishonour.' Get out of that class. And how? By purifying yourselves. So, then, there is no necessity of any sort which determines the class to which we belong except our own earnestness and effort. You remember our Lord's other parable of the four sowings in four different soils. Was there any unconquerable necessity which compelled the wayside soil to be hard and beaten, or the rocky one to be impermeable, or the thorny one to be productive only of thorns and briars? Could they not all have become good soil? And why did they not? Because the men that they represented did not care to become so. And in like manner there is no reason why the earthen pot should not become gold, or the wooden one silver, or the silver one gold—ay! or the gold silver, or the silver wood, or the wood earth. Paul was an earthen vessel, and he became 'a chosen vessel' of gold. Judas was a vessel of silver, and he became a vessel of earth, and was dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. So you can settle your place. How do you settle it? By purity. Character makes us serviceable. Christ's kingdom is more helped, His purposes advanced, His will furthered, by holy lives than by shining gifts. And whether you can do much for Him by the latter or no, you can do more for Him by far by means of the former. And you can all have that if you will.

Only notice that purity which makes serviceable, and therefore honourable, and is capable of degrees as between silver and gold, is to be won by our own efforts. 'If a man therefore shall purify *himself*.' I know, of course, that whoever has honestly set himself, for Christ's sake, to the task of purifying himself, very soon finds out that he, with his ten thousand, cannot beat the king that comes against him with twenty thousand; and if he is a wise man he sends an embassage, not to the enemy, but to the Emperor, and says, 'Come Thou and help me.' If we try to purify ourselves, we are necessarily thrown back upon God's help to do it. But there must be the personal effort, and that effort must go mainly, I think, in the direction of effort to grasp and hold by faith and obedience the Divine Life which comes into us and purifies us; and in the other direction of effort to apply to every part of our character and conduct the divine help which we bring to our aid by our humble faith.

So, brethren, we can, if we will, purify ourselves, and we shall do it most surely when we fall back upon him, and say, 'Give me the power that I may perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord.'

Some of us are vessels in another house. But Christ has bound the strong man and spoiled his goods, and taken from him all the armour in which he trusted, and the vessels which he used. And if we will only take Christ's liberation, and cast ourselves on His grace and power, then we shall be lifted from the dark and doleful house of the strong man, and set in the great house of the great Lord. Yield not your members as instruments of unrighteousness, but yield yourselves unto God, and your members as instruments of righteousness to Him.

FORM AND POWER

'Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.'—2 Tim. iii. 5.

In this, his last letter and legacy, the Apostle Paul is much occupied with the anticipation of coming evils. It is most natural that the faithful watchman, knowing that the hour of relieving guard was very near at hand, should eagerly scan the horizon in quest of the enemies that might approach when he was no longer there to deal with them. Old men are apt to take a gloomy view of coming days, but the frequent references to the corruptions of the Church which occur in this letter are a great deal more than an old man's pessimism. They were warnings, which were amply vindicated by the history of the post-apostolic age of the Church, which was the seed-bed of all manner of corruptions, and they point to permanent dangers, the warning against which is as needful for us as for any period.

The Apostle draws here a very dark picture of the corrupt forms of Christianity, the advent of which he tremblingly anticipated. I do not mean to enter at all upon the dark catalogue of the vices which he enumerates, except to point out that its beginning and the middle and the end are very significant. It begins with 'lovers of self'—that is the root of all forms of sin. In the centre there stands 'lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God'; and at the end, summing up the whole, are the words of our text, 'having the form of godliness, but denying the power thereof.'

I do not suppose that these words need much explanation. 'Godliness,' in the New Testament, means not only the disposition which we call piety, but the conduct which flows from it, and which we may call practical religion. The form or outward appearance of that we all understand. But what is the 'denying the power thereof?' It does not consist in words, but in deeds. In these latter epistles we find 'denying' frequently used as equivalent to *abjuring*, renouncing, casting off. For instance, in a passage singularly and antithetically parallel to that of my text, we read 'denying ungodliness and worldly lusts,' which simply means throwing off their dominion. And in like manner the denial here is no verbal rejection of the principles of the gospel, which would be inconsistent with the notion of still retaining the form of godliness; but it is the practical renunciation of the power, which is inherent in all true godliness, of moulding the life and character—the practical renunciation of that even whilst preserving a superficial, unreal appearance of being subject to it.

This, then, being the explanation, and the rough outline of the state of things which the Apostle contemplates as hurrying onwards to corrupt the Church after his departure, let us look at some of the thoughts connected with it.

I. Observe the sad frequency of such a condition.

Wherever any great cause or principle is first launched into the world, it evokes earnest enthusiasm, and brings men to heroisms of consecration and service. And so when Christianity was first launched, there was less likelihood of its attracting to itself men who were not in earnest, and who were mere formalists. But even in the Apostolic Church there were an Ananias and a Sapphira, a Simon Magus, and a Demas. As years go on, and primitive enthusiasms die out, and the cause which was once all freshly radiant and manifestly heaven-born becomes an earthly institution, there is a growing tendency to gather round it superficial, half-and-half adherents. Whatsoever is respectable, and whatsoever is venerable, and whatsoever is customary will be sure to have attached to it a mass of loose and nominal adherents; and the gospel has had its full share of such.

I was talking not very long ago to a leading man belonging to another denomination than my own; and he quietly, as a matter of course said, 'Our communicants are so many hundred thousands. I reckon that a *quarter* of them, or thereabouts, are truly spiritual men!' and he seemed to think that nobody would question the correctness of the calculation and the proportion. Why, 'Christendom' is largely a mass of pagans masquerading as Christians.

And every church has its full share of such people; loose adherents, clogs upon all movement, who bring down the average of warmth like the great icebergs that float in the Atlantic and lower the temperature of the summer all over Europe. They make consecration 'eccentric'; they make consistent, out-and-out Christian living 'odd,' 'unlike the ordinary thing,' and they pull down the spirituality of the Church almost to the level of the world. Every communion of so-called Christian men has its full share of these. The same thing applies to us, and every Church of God on the face of the earth has a little core of earnest Christians, who live the life, and a great envelope and surrounding of men who, as my text says, have the form of godliness, and practically deny the power thereof. Widespread, and all but universal, this condition of things is. And so let each of us say, 'Lord! Is it I?'

II. Think, next, of the underground working of this evil.

These people about whom Paul is speaking in my text were, I suppose, mostly, though by no means exclusively, conscious pretenders to what they did not possess. But the number of hypocrites, in the full sense of the word, is amazingly small, and the men whom you would brand as most distinctly so, if you came to talk to them, would amaze you to find how entirely ignorant they were of the fact that they were dramatising and pretending to piety, and that there was next to no reality of it in them. A very little bit of gold, beaten out very thin, will cover over, with a semblance of value, an enormous area. And men beat out the little modicum of sincerity that they have so very thin that it covers, and gives a deceptive appearance of brilliancy and solidity to an enormous amount of windy flatulence and mere pretence. Hypocrites, in the rude, vulgar sense of the word, are, I was going to say, as rare as, but I will say a great deal rarer than, thoroughgoing and intensely earnest and sincere Christians. These men, the precursors of Gnostic heresies and a hundred others, had no notion that their picture was like this, and if they had been shown Paul's grim catalogue they would have said, 'Oh! a gross caricature, and not the least like me.' And that is what a great many other men do as well.

But it is an unconscious hypocrisy, an unconscious sliding away from the basis of reality on to the slippery basis of pretence and appearance that I want to say a word or two about. The worse a man is, the less he knows it. The more completely a professing Christian has lost his hold of the substance and is clinging only to the form, the less does he suspect that this indictment has any application to him. The very sign and symptom of spiritual degeneracy and corruption is unconsciousness, as the great champion of Israel, when his locks were cropped in Delilah's lap, went out to exercise his mighty limbs as at other times, and knew not, till he vainly tried feats which their ebbing strength was no longer equal to perform, that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. The more completely a man's limbs are frost-bitten the more comfortable and warm they are, and the less does he know it. If a man says, 'Your text has no sort of application to me,' he thereby shows that it has a very close application to him.

I need say little about the reasons for this unconsciousness. We are all accustomed to take very lenient views, when we take any at all, of our own character; and the tendency of all conduct is to pull down conscience to the level of conduct, and to vindicate that conduct by biassed decisions of a partial conscience. And so I have no doubt that there are people thinking how well my words fit some other man from whom there has, without there knowing it, ebbed away, by slow, sad drops, almost all the life-blood of their Christianity, like some great tree that stands in the woods, fair to appearance, with solid bole and widespread leafage, and expanded branches, and yet the heart is out of it; and when the tempest comes and it falls, everybody can look into the hollow trunk and see that for years it has been rotten.

Brethren, the underground enemies of our Christian earnestness are far more dangerous than the apparent and manifest antagonists; and there are many men amongst us who would repel with indignation a manifest assault against their godliness, who yield without resistance, and almost without consciousness, to the sly seductions of unsuspected evil. The arrow that flies in darkness is more deadly than the pestilence that wasteth at noonday.

III. Further, notice the ever-operating causes that produce this condition.

I suppose that one, at any rate, of the main examples of this 'form' was participation in the simple worship of the primitive Church. And although the phrase by no means refers merely to acts of worship, still that is one of the main fields in which this evil is manifest. Many of us substitute outward connection with the Church for inward union with Jesus Christ. All external forms have a tendency to assert themselves, and to detain in themselves, instead of helping to rise above themselves, our poor sense-ridden natures. How many of us are there whose religion consists very largely in coming to this place, standing up when other people sing, seeming to unite in prayer and praise, perhaps participating in the sacred rites of the Church; but having most of their religion safely locked up in their pews along with their hymn-books when they leave the chapel, and waiting for them quietly, without troubling them, until next Sunday! We need outward forms of worship. It is a sign of our weakness that we do, but they are so full of danger that one sometimes wishes that they could be broken up and made fluent, and, at least for a time, that something else could be substituted for them.

Seeing that the purest and the simplest of forms may become like a dirty window, an obscuring medium which shuts out instead of lets in the light, it seems to me that the Churches are wisest which admit least of the dangerous element into their external worship, and try to have as little of form as may keep the spirit. I know that simple forms may be abused quite as much as elaborate ones. I know that a Quakers' meeting-house is often quite as much a house of formal and not of real communion as a Roman Catholic cathedral. Let us remember how full of dangers they all, and always are. And let us be very sure that we do not substitute church membership, coming to church or chapel, going to prayer-meeting, teaching in Sunday-schools, reading devout books, and the like, for inward submission to the power.

Another cause always operating is the tendency which all action of every kind has to escape from the dominion of its first motives, and to become merely mechanical and habitual. Habit is a most precious ally of goodness, but habitual goodness tends to become involuntary and mechanical goodness, and so to cease to be goodness at all. And the more that we can, in each given case, make each individual act of godliness, whether it be in worship or in practical life, the result of a fresh approach to the one central and legitimate impulse of the Christian life, the better it will be for ourselves. All great causes, as I was saying a moment or two ago, tend to pass from the dominion of impulse into that of use and wont and mere routine, and our religion and practical godliness in daily life is apt to do that, as well as all our other actions.

And then, still further, there is the constant operation of earth and sense and daily duties and pressing cares, which war against the reality and completeness of our submission to the power of godliness. Grains of sand, microscopically minute in the aggregate, bury the temples and the images of the gods in the Nile Valley. The multitude of small cares and duties which are blown upon us by every wind have the effect of withdrawing us, unless we are continually watchful, from that one foundation of all, the love of Jesus Christ felt in our daily lives. Unless we perpetually tighten our hold, it will loosen, by very weariness of the muscles. Unless the boat be firmly anchored it will be drifted down the stream. Unless we take care, our Christian life and earnestness will ooze out at our finger-tips, and we shall never know that it is gone. The world, our own weakness, our very tasks and duties, the pressure of circumstances, the sway of our senses, and the very habit of doing right—all of these may tend to make us mechanical and formal participators in the religious life. and unconscious hypocrites.

IV. So, lastly, let me point you to the discipline which may avert this evil.

First and foremost, I would say, let us cherish a clear and continual recognition of the reality of the danger Forewarned is forearmed. He that will take counsel of his own weakness, and be taught by God's Word how unreliable he himself is, and how strong the forces are which tend to throw his religion all to the surface, will thereby be, if not insured against the danger, at least made a great deal more competent to deal with it. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always,' and that knows how likely he is to go wrong unless he carefully seeks to keep himself right.

Rigid, habitual self-inspection, in the light of God's Word, is an all-important help to prevent this sliding of our Christian life into superficiality. If what I was saying about the unconsciousness of decline be at all true, then most eloquently and impressively does it say to us all, 'Watch! for we know not what may be going on underground unless we have a continual carefulness of inspection.' We should watch our own characters, the movement of our spiritual nature, and the effect and operation of our habits and of our participation in outward forms of Christianity; we should watch these as carefully as men in the tropics look into their beds and their clothing before they put them on, or get into them, for snakes and scorpions. In a country which is only preserved by the dykes from being swallowed up by the sea, the minutest inspection of the rampart is the condition of security, and if there be a hole big enough for a mouse to creep through, the water will come in and make a gap wide enough to drown a province in a little while. And so, brethren, seeing that we have such dangers round about us, and that the most formidable of them all are powers that work in the dark, let us be very sure that our eyes have searched, as well as we can, the inmost corners of our lives, and that no lurking vermin lie beneath the unturned up stones.

And then, lastly, and as that without which all else is vain, let us make continual and earnest and contrite efforts day by day to renew and deepen our personal communion with Jesus Christ. He is the source of the power which godliness operates in our lives, and the closer we keep to Him the more it will flood our hearts and make us real, out-and-out Christians, and not shallow and self-deceived pretenders.

The tree that had nothing but leaves upon it hid its absence of fruit by its abundance of foliage. The Master came, as He comes to you and to me, seeking fruit, and if He finds it not He will perpetuate the barrenness by His blasting word, 'No fruit grow upon thee henceforward for ever.'

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE

'I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom; 2. Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. 3. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 5. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. . . . 16. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. 17. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. 18. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'—2 TIM. iv. 1-5; 16-18.

TIMOTHY does not appear to have been a strong man, either in body or mind, if we may judge from the exhortations and tonics which Paul felt it needful to administer in this letter. The young, gentle soul was more overwhelmed by Paul's trial and impending death than the heroic martyr himself was. Nothing shook that steadfast heart, and from the very grave's mouth he spoke brave encouragement.

Verses 1-5 are a rousing appeal to Timothy to fulfil his ministry. Embedded in it there is a sad prophecy of coming dark days for the Church, which constitutes, not a reason for despondency or for abandoning the work, but for doing it with all one's might. But the all-powerful motive for every Christian teacher, whether of old or young, is pressed on Timothy in the solemn thoughts that he works in the sight of God and of Jesus, and that he and those to whom he speaks, and whose blood may be laid to his charge, are to see him when he appears, and to stand at his judgment bar.

The master's eye makes diligent servants; the tremendous issues for speaker and hearer suspended on the preaching of the gospel, if they were ever burning before our inward vision, would make superfluous all other motives for straining every nerve and using every opportunity and power. How we should preach and teach and live if the great white throne and He who will sit on it were ever shining before us! Would not that sight burn up slothfulness, cowardice, perfunctory discharge of duty, mechanical repetition of scarcely felt words, and all the other selfishnesses and worldlinesses which sap our earnestness in our work?

The special duties enjoined are, first and foremost, the most general one to 'preach the word,' which is, indeed, a duty incumbent on all Christians; and then, subordinate to it, and descriptive of how it is to be done, the duty of persevering attention to that great life task—'be instant'; that is, be at it, be always at it. But is not 'in season, out of season' an unwise and dangerous precept? Do we not do more harm than good by thrusting gospel teaching down people's throats at unfitting times? No doubt tact and prudence are as needful as zeal, but perhaps they are rather more abundant at present than it, and at a time that looks out of season to a man who does not wish to hear of Christ at any time, or to one who does not wish to speak of Him at any time, may be 'in season' for the very reason that it seems out of season. Felix is not an infallible judge of 'a convenient season.' It would do no harm if Christian people 'obtruded' their religion a little more.

But the general work of 'preaching the word' is to be accompanied with special care over the life of believers, which is to be active in three closely connected forms. Timothy is, where needful, to 'convict' of sin; for so the word rendered 'reprove' means, as applied to the mission of the Comforter in John xvi. 8. 'Rebuke' naturally follows conviction, and exhortation, or, rather, consolation or encouragement, as naturally follows rebuke. If the faithful teacher has sometimes to use the lancet, he must have the balm and the bandage at hand. And this triple ministry is to be 'with all longsuffering' and 'teaching.' Chrysostom beautifully comments, 'Not as in anger, not as in hatred, not as insulting over him, . . . as loving, as sympathising, as more distressed than himself at his grief.' And we may add, as letting 'the teaching' do the convicting and rebuking, not the teacher's judgment or tongue.

The prospect of dark days coming, which so often saddens the close of a strenuous life for Christ and the

Church, shadowed Paul's spirit, and added to his burdens. At Ephesus he had spoken forebodings of 'grievous wolves' entering in after his death, and now he feels that he will be powerless to check the torrent of corruption, and is eager that, when he is gone, Timothy and others may be wise and brave to cope with the tendencies to turn from the simple truth and to prefer 'fables.'

The picture which he draws is true to-day. Healthful teaching is distasteful. Men's ears itch, and want to be tickled. The desire of the multitude is to have teachers who will reflect their own opinions and prejudices, who will not go against the grain or rub them the wrong way, who will flatter the mob which calls itself the people, and will keep 'conviction' and 'rebuke' well in the background. That is no reason for any Christian teacher's being cast down, but is a reason for his buckling to his work, and not shunning to declare the whole counsel of God.

The true way to front and conquer these evil tendencies is by the display of an unmistakable self-sacrifice in the life, by sobriety in all things and willing endurance of hardship where needful, and by redoubled earnestness in proclaiming the gospel, which men need whether they want it or not, and by filling to the full the sphere of our work, and discharging all its obligations.

The final words in verses 16-18 carry on the triumphant strain. There had been some previous stage of Paul's trial, in his second imprisonment, of which we have no details except those here—when the Roman Christians and all his friends had deserted him, and that he had thus been conformed unto Christ's sufferings, and tasted the bitterness of friendship failing when needed most. But no trace of bitterness remained in his spirit, and, like his Lord, he prayed for them who had thus deserted him. He was left alone, but the Christ, who had borne his burden alone, died that none of His servants might ever have to know the same dreary solitude, and the absence of other comforters had made the more room, as well as need, for Him.

Paul's predecessor, Stephen, had seen Jesus standing at the right hand of God. Paul had an even more blessed experience; for Jesus stood by him, there in the Roman court, in which, perhaps, the emperor sate on the tribunal. What could terrify him with that Advocate at his side?

But it is beautiful that the Apostle does not first think of his Lord's presence as ministering to his comfort, but as nerving him to 'fulfil His message.' The trial was to him, first, a crowning opportunity of preaching the gospel, and, no doubt, it gave him an audience of such a sort as he had never had. What did it matter even to himself what became of him, if 'all the Gentiles,' and among them, no doubt, senators, generals, statesmen, and possibly Nero, 'might hear'? Only as a second result of Christ's help does he add that he was rescued, as from between the very teeth of the lion. The peril was extreme; his position seemed hopeless, the jaws were wide open, and he was held by the sharp fangs, but Christ dragged him out. The true David delivered his lamb out of the lion's mouth.

The past is the prophecy of the future to those that trust in a changeless Christ, who has all the resources of the universe at command. 'That which hath been is that which shall be,' and he who can say 'he *hath* delivered from so great a death' ought to have no hesitation in adding 'in whom I trust that He *will* yet deliver me.' That was the use that Paul made of his experience, and so his last words are an utterance of unfaltering faith and a doxology.

There appears to be an interesting echo of the Lord's Prayer in verse 18. Observe the words 'deliver,' 'from evil,' 'kingdom,' 'glory.' Was Paul's confidence disappointed? No; for surely he was delivered from every evil work, when the sharp sword struck off his head as he knelt outside the walls of Rome. And Death was Christ's last messenger, sent to 'save him unto His heavenly kingdom,' that there he might, with loftier words than even he could utter on earth, ascribe to Him 'glory for ever. Amen.'

A PRISONER'S DYING THOUGHTS

I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. 7. I have ought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: 8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.—2 TIM. iv. 6-8.

PAUL'S long day's work is nearly done. He is a prisoner in Rome, all but forsaken by his friends, in hourly expectation of another summons before Nero. To appear before him was, he says, like putting his head into 'the mouth of the lion.' His horizon was darkened by sad anticipations of decaying faith and growing corruptions in the Church. What a road he had travelled since that day when, on the way to Damascus, he saw the living Christ, and heard the words of His mouth!

It had been but a failure of a life, if judged by ordinary standards. He had suffered the loss of all things, had thrown away position and prospects, had exposed himself to sorrows and toils, had been all his days a poor man and solitary, had been hunted, despised, laughed at by Jew and Gentile, worried and badgered even by so-called brethren, loved the less, the more he loved. And now the end is near. A prison and the headsman's sword are the world's wages to its best teacher. When Nero is on the throne, the only possible place for Paul is a dungeon opening on to the scaffold. Better to be the martyr than the Cæsar!

These familiar words of our text bring before us a very sweet and wonderful picture of the prisoner, so near his end. How beautifully they show his calm waiting for the last hour and the bright forms which lightened for him the darkness of his cell! Many since have gone to their rest with their hearts stayed on the same thoughts, though their lips could not speak them to our listening ears. Let us be thankful for them, and pray that for ourselves, when we come to that hour, the same quiet heroism and the same sober hope mounting to calm certainty may be ours.

These words refer to the past, the present, the future. 'I have fought—the time of my departure is come—henceforth there is laid up.'

I. So we notice, first, the quiet courage which looks death full in the face without a tremor. The language implies that Paul knows his death hour is all but here. As the Revised Version more accurately gives it, 'I am already being offered'—the process is begun, his sufferings at the moment are, as it were, the initial steps of his sacrifice—'and the time of my departure is *come*.' The tone in which he tells Timothy this is very noticeable. There is no sign of excitement, no tremor of emotion, no affectation of stoicism in the simple sentences. He is not playing up to a part, nor pretending to be anything which he is not. If ever language sounded perfectly simple and genuine, this does.

And the occasion of the whole section is as remarkable as the tone. He is led to speak about himself at all, only in order to enforce his exhortation to Timothy to put his shoulder to the wheel, and do his work for Christ with all his might. All he wishes to say is simply, do your work with all your might, for I am going off the field. But having begun on that line of thought, he is carried on to say more than was needed for his immediate purpose, and thus inartificially to let us see what was filling his mind.

And the subject into which he subsides after these lofty thoughts is as remarkable as either tone or occasion. Minute directions about such small matters as books and parchments, and perhaps a warm cloak for winter, and homely details about the movements of the little group of his friends immediately follow. All this shows with what a perfectly unforced courage Paul fronted his fate, and looked death in the eyes. The anticipation did not dull his interest in God's work in the world, as witness the warnings and exhortations of the context. It did not withdraw his sympathies from his companions. It did not hinder him from pursuing his studies and pursuits, nor from providing for small matters of daily convenience. If ever a man was free from any taint of fanaticism or morbid enthusiasm, it was this man waiting so calmly in his prison for his death.

There is great beauty and force in the expressions which he uses for death here. He will not soil his lips with its ugly name, but calls it an offering and a departure. There is a widespread unwillingness to say the word 'Death.' It falls on men's hearts like clods on a coffin. So all people and languages have adopted euphemisms for it, fair names which wrap silk round its dart and somewhat hide its face. But there are two opposite reasons for their use—terror and confidence. Some men dare not speak of death because they dread it so much, and try to put some kind of shield between themselves and the very thought of it, by calling it something less dreadful to them than itself. Some men, on the other hand, are familiar with the thought, and though it is solemn, it is not altogether repellent to them. Gazing on death with the thoughts and feelings which Jesus Christ has given them concerning it, they see it in new aspects, which take away much of its blackness. And so they do not feel inclined to use the ugly old name, but had rather call it by some which reflect the gentler aspect that it now wears to them. So 'sleep,' and 'rest' and the like are the names which have almost driven the other out of the New Testament—witness of the fact that in inmost reality Jesus Christ 'has abolished death,' however the physical portion of it may still remain master of our bodies.

But looking for a moment at the specific metaphors used here, we have first, that of an offering, or more particularly of a drink offering, or libation, 'I am already being poured out.' No doubt the special reason for the selection of this figure here is Paul's anticipation of a violent death. The shedding of his blood was to be an offering poured out like some costly wine upon the altar, but the power of the figure reaches far beyond that special application of it. We may all make our deaths a sacrifice, an offering to God, for we may yield up our will to God's will, and so turn that last struggle into an act of worship and self surrender. When we recognise His hand, when we submit our wills to His purposes, when 'we live unto the Lord,' if we live, and 'die unto Him,' if we die, then Death will lose all its terror and most of its pain, and will become for us what it was to Paul, a true offering up of self in thankful worship. Nay, we may even say, that so we shall in a certain subordinate sense be 'made conformable unto His death' who committed His spirit into His Father's hands, and laid down His life, of His own will. The essential character and far-reaching effects of this sacrifice we cannot imitate, but we can so yield up our wills to God and leave life so willingly and trustfully as that death shall make our sacrifice complete.

Another more familiar and equally striking figure is next used, when Paul speaks of the time of his 'departure.' The thought is found in most tongues. Death is a going away, or, as Peter calls it (with a glance, possibly, at the special meaning of the word in the Old Testament, as well as at its use in the solemn statement of the theme of converse on the Mountain of Transfiguration), an Exodus. But the well-worn image receives new depth and sharpness of outline in Christianity. To those who have learned the meaning of Christ's resurrection, and feed their souls on the hopes which it warrants, Death is merely a change of place or state, an accident affecting locality, and little more. We have had plenty of changes before. Life has been one long series of departures. This is different from the others mainly in that it is the last, and that to go away from this visible and fleeting show, where we wander aliens among things which have no true kindred with us, is to go home, where there will be no more pulling up the tent-pegs, and toiling across the deserts in monotonous change. How strong is the conviction, spoken in this name for death, that the essential life lasts on quite unaltered through it all! How slight the else formidable thing is made! We may change climates, and for the stormy bleakness of life may have the long still days of heaven, but we do not change ourselves. We lose nothing worth keeping when we leave behind the body, as a dress not fitted for home, where we are going. We but travel one more stage, though it be the last, and part of it be in pitchy darkness. Some pass over it as in a fiery chariot, like Paul and many a martyr. Some have to toil through it with slow steps and bleeding feet and fainting heart; but all may have a Brother with them, and, holding His hand, may find that the journey is not so hard as they feared, and the home from which they shall remove no more, better than they hoped when they hoped the most.

II. We have here, too, the peaceful look backwards. There is something very noteworthy in the threefold aspect under which his past life presents itself to the Apostle who is so soon to leave it. He thinks of it as a contest, as a race, as a stewardship. The first image suggests the tension of a long struggle with opposing wrestlers who have tried to throw him, but in vain. The world, both of men and things, has had to be grappled with and mastered. His own sinful nature and especially his animal nature has had to be kept under by sheer force, and every moment has been resistance to subtle omnipresent forces that have sought to thwart his aspirations and hamper his performances. His successes have had to be fought for, and everything that he has done has been done after a struggle. So is it with all noble life; so will it be to the end.

He thinks of life as a race. That speaks of continuous advance in one direction, and more emphatically still, of effort that sets the lungs panting and strains every muscle to the utmost. He thinks of it as a stewardship. He has kept the faith (whether by that word we are to understand the body of truth believed or the act of believing) as a sacred deposit committed to him, of which he has been a good steward, and which he is now ready to return to his Lord. There is much in these letters to Timothy about keeping treasures entrusted to one's care. Timothy is bid to 'keep that good thing which is committed to thee,' as Paul here declares that he has done. Nor is such guarding of a precious deposit confined to us stewards on earth, but the Apostle is sure that his loving Lord, to whom he has entrusted himself, will with like tenderness and carefulness 'keep that which he has committed unto Him against that day.' The confidence in that faithful Keeper made it possible for Paul to be faithful to his trust, and as a steward who was bound by all ties to his Lord, to guard His possessions and administer His affairs. Life was full of voices urging him to give up the faith. Bribes and threats, and his own sense-bound nature, and the constant whispers of the world had tempted him all along the road to fling it away as a worthless thing, but he had kept it safe; and now, nearing the end and the account, he can put his hand on the secret place near his heart where it lies, and feel that it is there, ready to be restored to his Lord, with the thankful confession, 'Thy pound hath gained ten pounds.'

So life looks to this man in his retrospect as mainly a field for struggle, effort, and fidelity. This world is not to be for us an enchanted garden of delights, any more than it should appear a dreary desert of disappointment and woe. But it should be to us mainly a palæstra, or gymnasium and exercising ground. You cannot expect many flowers or much grass in the place where men wrestle and run. We need not much mind though it be bare, if we can only stand firm on the hard earth, nor lament that there are so few delights to stay our eyes from the goal. We are here for serious work; let us not be too eager for pleasures that may hinder our efforts and weaken our vigour, but be content to lap up a hasty draught from the brooks by the way, and then on again to the fight.

Such a view of life makes it radiant and fair while it lasts, and makes the heart calm when the hour comes to leave it all behind. So thinking of the past, there may be a sense of not unwelcome lightening from a load of responsibility when we have got all the stress and strain of the conflict behind us, and have at any rate not been altogether beaten. We may feel like a captain who has brought his ship safe across the Atlantic, through foul weather and past many an iceberg, and gives a great sigh of relief as he hands over the charge to the pilot, who will take her across the harbour bar and bring her to her anchorage in the landlocked bay where no tempests rave any more for ever.

Prosaic theologians have sometimes wondered at the estimate which Paul here makes of his past services and faithfulness, but the wonder is surely unnecessary. It is very striking to notice the difference between his judgment of himself while he was still in the thick of the conflict, and now when he is nearing the end. Then one main hope which animated all his toils and nerved him for the sacrifice of life itself was 'that I might finish my course with joy.' Now in the quiet of his dungeon, that hope is fulfilled, and triumphant thoughts, like shining angels, keep him company in his solitude. Then he struggled, and wrestled, touched by the haunting fear lest after that he has preached to others he himself should be rejected. Now the dread has passed, and a meek hope stands by his side.

What is this change of feeling but an instance of what, thank God, we so often see, that at the end the heart, which has been bowed with fears and self-depreciation, is filled with peace? They who tremble most during the conflict are most likely to look back with solid satisfaction, while they who never knew a fear all along the course will often have them surging in upon their souls too late, and will see the past in a new lurid light, when they are powerless to change it. Blessed is the man who thus feareth always. At the end he will have hope. The past struggles are joyful in memory, as the mountain ranges, which were all black rock and white snow while we toiled up their inhospitable steeps, lie purple in the mellowing distance, and burn like fire as the sunset strikes their peaks. Many a wild winter's day has a fair, cloudless close, and lingering opal hues diffused through all the quiet sky. 'At eventide it shall be light.' Though we go all our lives mourning and timid, there may yet be granted us ere the end some vision of the true significance of these lives, and some humble hope that they have not been wholly in vain.

Such an estimate has nothing in common with self-complacency. It co-exists with a profound consciousness of many a sin, many a defeat, and much unfaithfulness. It belongs only to a man who, conscious of these, is 'looking for the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life,' and is the direct result, not the antagonist, of lowly self-abasement, and contrite faith in Him by whom alone our stained selves and poor broken services can ever be acceptable. Let us learn too that the only life that bears being looked back upon is a life of Christian devotion and effort. It shows fairer when seen in the strange cross lights that come when we stand on the boundary of two worlds, with the white radiance of eternity beginning to master the vulgar oil lamps of earth, than when seen by these alone. All others have their shabbiness and their selfishness disclosed then. I remember once seeing a mob of revellers streaming out from a masked ball in a London theatre in the early morning sunlight; draggled and heavy-eyed, the rouge showing on the cheeks, and the shabby tawdriness of the foolish costumes pitilessly revealed by the pure light. So will many a life look when the day dawns, and the wild riot ends in its unwelcome beams.

The one question for us all, then, will be, Have I lived for Christ, and by Him? Let it be the one question for us now, and let it be answered, Yes. Then we shall have at the last a calm confidence, equally far removed from presumption and from dread, which will let us look back on life with peace, though it be full of failures and sins, and forward with humble hope of the reward which we shall receive from His mercy.

III. The climax of all is the triumphant look forward. 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' In harmony with the images of the conflict and the race, the crown here is not the emblem of sovereignty, but of victory, as indeed is almost without exception the case in the New Testament. The idea of the royal dignity of Christians in the future is seforth rather under the emblem of association with Christ on His throne, while the wreath on their brows is the coronal of laurel, 'meed of mighty conquerors,' or the twine of leaves given to him who, panting, touched the goal. The reward, then, which is meant by the emblem, whatever be its essence, comes through effort and conflict. 'A man is not crowned, except he strive.'

That crown, according to other words of Scripture, consists of 'life,' or 'glory'—that is to say, the issue and outcome of believing service and faithful stewardship here is the possession of the true life, which stands in union with God, in measure so great, and in quality so wondrous that it lies on the pure locks of the victors like a flashing diadem, all ablaze with light in a hundred jewels. The completion and exaltation of our nature and characters by the illapse of 'life' so sovereign and transcendent that it is 'glory' is the consequence of all Christian effort here in the lower levels, where the natural life is always weakness and sometimes shame, and the spiritual life is at the best but a hidden glory and a struggling spark. There is no profit in seeking to gaze into that light of glory so as to discern the shapes of those who walk in it, or the elements of its lambent flames. Enough that in its gracious beauty transfigured souls move as in their native atmosphere. Enough that even our dim vision can see that they have for their companion 'One like unto the Son of Man.' It is Christ's own life which they share; it is Christ's own glory which irradiates them.

That crown is 'a crown of righteousness' in another sense from that in which it is 'a crown of life.' The latter expression indicates the material, if we may say so, of which it is woven, but the former rather points to the character to which it belongs or is given. Righteousness alone can receive that reward. It is not the struggle or the conflict which wins it, but the character evolved in the struggle, not the works of strenuous service, but the moral nature expressed in these. There is such a congruity between righteousness and the crown of life, that it can be laid on none other head but that of a righteous man, and if it could, all its amaranthine flowers would shrivel and fall when they touched an impure brow. It is, then, the crown of righteousness, as belonging by its very nature to such characters alone.

But whatever is the essential congruity between the character and the crown, we have to remember too that, according to this Apostle's constant teaching, the righteousness which clothes us in fair raiment, and has a natural right to the wreath of victory, is a gift, as truly as the crown itself, and is given to us all on condition of our simple trust in Jesus Christ. If we are to be 'found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless,' we must be 'found *in* Him, not having our own righteousness, but that which is ours through faith in Christ.' Toil and conflict and anxious desire to be true to our responsibilities will do much for a man, but they will not bring him that righteousness which brings down on the head the crown of life. We must trust to Christ to give us the righteousness in which we are justified, and to give us the righteousness by the working out of which in our life and character we are fitted for that great reward. He crowns our works and selves with exuberant and unmerited honours, but what he crowns is His own gift to us, and His great love must bestow both the righteousness and 'the crown.'

The crown is given at a time called by Paul 'at that day,' which is not the near day of his martyrdom, but that of His Lord's appearing. He does not speak of the fulness of the reward as being ready for him at death, but as being 'henceforth laid up for him in heaven.' So he looks forward beyond the grave. The immediate future after death was to his view a period of blessedness indeed, but not yet full. The state of the dead in Christ was a state of consciousness, a state of rest, a state of felicity, but also a state of expectation. To the full height of their present capacity they who sleep in Jesus are blessed, being still in His embrace, and their spirits pillowed on His heart, nor so sleeping that, like drowsy infants, they know not where they lie so safe, but only sleeping in so much as they rest from weariness, and have closed their eyes to the ceaseless turmoil of this fleeting world, and are lapped about for ever with the sweet, unbroken consciousness that they are 'present with the Lord.' What perfect repose, perfect fruition of all desires, perfect union with the perfect End and Object of all their being, perfect exemption from all sorrow, tumult, and sin can bring of blessedness, that they possess in over measure unfailingly. And, in addition, they still know the joy of hope, and have carried that jewel with them into another world, for they wait for 'the redemption of the body,' in the reception of which, 'at that day,' their life will be filled up to a yet fuller measure, and gleam with a more lustrous 'glory.' Now they rest and wait. Then shall they be crowned.

Nor must self-absorbed thoughts be allowed to bound our anticipations of that future. It is no solitary blessedness to which Paul looked forward Alone in his dungeon, alone before his judge when 'no man stood by' him, soon to be alone in his martyrdom, he leaps up in spirit at the thought of the mighty crowd among whom he will stand in that day, on every head a crown, in every heart the same love to the Lord whose life is in them all and makes them all one. So we may cherish the hope of a social heaven. Man's course begins in a garden, but it ends in a city. The final condition will be the perfection of human society. There all who love Christ will be drawn together, and old ties, broken for a little while here, be reknit in yet holier form, never to be sundered more.

Ah, friends, the all-important question for each of us is how may we have such a hope, like a great sunset light shining into the western windows of our souls? There is but one answer—Trust Christ. That is enough. Nothing else is. Is your life built on Jesus Christ? Are you trusting your salvation to Him? Are you giving Him your love and service? Does your life bear looking at to-day? Will it bear looking at in death? Will it bear His looking at in Judgment?

If you can humbly say, To me to live is Christ, then is it well. Living by Him we may fight and conquer, may win and obtain. Living by Him, we may be ready quietly to lie down when the time comes, and may have all the future filled with the blaze of a great hope that glows brighter as the darkness thickens. That peaceful hope will not leave us till consciousness fails, and then, when it has ceased to guide us, Christ Himself will lead us, scarcely knowing where we are, through the waters, and when we open our half-bewildered eyes in brief wonder, the first thing we see will be his welcoming smile, and His voice will say, as a tender surgeon might to a little child waking after an operation, 'It is all over.' We lift our hands wondering and find wreaths on our poor brows. We lift our eyes, and lo! all about us a crowned crowd of conquerors,

> 'And with the morn those angel faces smile
> Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile.'

DEMAS, LUKE, MARK

'**Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world. . . . 11. Only Luke** is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee; **for he is profitable to me for the ministry.'—2 TIM. iv. 10, 11.**

THIS last of Paul's letters is written, as is generally supposed, in his second imprisonment, and very near his martyrdom. The condition in which it represents him is remarkably contrasted, in several respects, with the conditions of his first imprisonment, as shown in the letters dating from that period. In these—in two of them, at all events—we find him surrounded by troops of friends, among whom the same three names as occur in my text appear as united with him in loyal confidence, and joining with him in greetings to his correspondents. Here they are again, but under what different circumstances! 'Demas hath forsaken me . . . Only Luke is with me. Take Mark'—who is also absent—'and bring him with thee.' The lonely Apostle has none of the Old Guard around him, except the faithful Luke, and he longs, before he dies, to see once more the familiar faces, and to be ministered to once more by accustomed and tender hands. That touch of humanity brings him very near us.

But what I have chosen my texts for is the sharp contrast which the three prominent names in them present in their attitude to the Apostle—Demas the renegade, Mark the restored runaway, Luke, the ever steadfast and faithful companion. Now of course these three men's relation to Jesus Christ was not identical with their relation to Paul. But at the same time their relation to Paul, one has little doubt, fluctuated with their relation to Jesus. It is scarcely possible to believe that the first of them would have done so base an act as to abandon the Apostle at the very crisis of his fate, unless his attachment to Jesus had become slender, nor that Mark's love to his Lord had not cooled when he 'went not with Paul and Barnabas to the work.' I take these three names as representations of three different types of character and spiritual experience, and I wish to look at the three portraits in succession; only I venture to alter the order in which they appear in the text. First, then—

I. Demas the renegade. We know nothing of him except that in the letters of the earlier imprisonment his name appears, honoured by Paul with the designation of his 'fellow-worker,' evidently admitted into the inner circle, living in amity and close communion with the other members of it, trusted and honoured, a man of some maturity and advancement, and now guilty of the base act of leaving the Apostle. How deeply that wounded Paul's sensitive heart the language of our text sufficiently shows. It is a sad fate that all the world should know that fact, and only that, about Demas, that he should be cursed and condemned to such an immortality, and go down through the ages branded with 'he hath forsaken me, having loved this present world.' He was not a monster, but just a man like the rest of us; and he came to his bad eminence by a very well-trodden and familiar path. He 'hath forsaken me, having loved this present world'—that is to say, he was a religious man who had not religion enough to resist the constant attractions and seductions of this

what was it that he loved in the

present, and because he loved it, in one or other of its forms—wealth, ease, comfort, a whole skin, reputation, or whatever it may have been—more than he loved Paul's Master, he turned his back upon principle, friendship, honour, duty, everything noble, and buried himself in the far-off Thessalonica. There are a great many Demases amongst us, and a great many different kinds of Thessalonicas to which we run. But we are all exposed to that same danger, and so we may well look at this one soul that fell under its spell, and was too weak to resist its pertinacious solicitations, and say to ourselves: 'Lord, is it I?'

For there is nothing in human sin that is alien from any of us, and no depth of lapse and apostasy is so profound but that the tendencies towards it, and the possibilities of it, are in us, even us also. So let me translate into less well-worn words the language of the text which, for all its force, is so familiar that it does not appeal to us as it ought to do.

'This present world,' what is that? Well, it is Protean, as I have already hinted, in its shapes, and all manner of solicitations come from it, but we may say in general terms that it is the aggregate of 'things seen and temporal' which, subtle, and certainly corresponding to our own weakest sides, appealing to some of us in the shape of wealth, to some of us in the shape of earthly loves, to some of us in the shape of material advantages, to some of us in the form of the 'hollow wraith of dying fame,' to some of us in the nobler guise of scientific pursuits, lie confined within the limits of the phenomenal and the material, but to all of us being essentially the presentation of the visible, the material, the transient as the aim to strain after, and the good to count as our treasure.

[illegible]
come to it

Let us remember how persistent and how terribly strong the appeal of 'this present world' is to us all. Its operation is continual upon us. Here it is, and we are in necessary connection with it, and it is our duty to be occupied with it, and it is cowardice to shirk the duty because of the peril that lies in it. You have to go to your business to-morrow morning, and I have to go to my books or my work; and the task for each of us is—and God knows how hard a task it is—to have our hearts in heaven whilst our hands are busy with the things around us. Christianity enjoins no false asceticism. There is little need to preach that to-day, but still it is to be remembered that it is duty to be occupied with the world, and fatal sin to love it. And just because it is so difficult to keep upon that knife-edge, so difficult to put all our pith and power into our occupation with material things, and yet never to be tempted into the love of them which fights against all nobleness of life, is it incumbent on me, over and over again, to reiterate to you and to myself the old threadbare commonplace, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world.' Leave your mark on them, work on them diligently, and with all your heart, bend them to be your servants, and to help you to rise to the things above them, but on your soul's peril keep clear of that bowing down before them, that trusting in them, that longing for them, that despair if you lose them, which together make up the love of the world, and the lust thereof which passes away. There is an enemy within the fortress who is always ready and eager to fling open the gates to the besiegers. For the things 'seen and temporal' correspond with, and have their ally in, the senses by which we are brought into contact with them. And unless there is a very strong religious impulse dominant in our minds, or to put it into more Christian words, unless 'the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given to us,' it cannot be but that we shall follow Demas, and run away to our Thessalonica, and leave Paul, and duty, and Paul's Master, and duty's Source, behind us.

For, brethren, if once this love of the world, which is always soliciting each of us, gets a footing in our hearts, it is impossible—as impossible as it is for two bodies to occupy the same place at the same time—for the love of Christ, which is the love of God, to continue dominant there. There cannot be two masters. That is plain common sense. If my head is full of thoughts and schemes, concerned only with the fleeting illusory present, then there is no room in it for His serene, ennobling presence. If my hands are laden with pebbles, I cannot clasp the diamonds that are offered to me.

Unless you fling out the sand-bags the balloon will cleave to the earth, and unless we turn the world out of our hearts, it is no use to say to Him, 'Come! Lord Jesus.' There is no room for Him. And though He comes through the narrowest opening of the door of the soul, He will not come unless we have to some extent conquered the world, and the love of the world.

If I could get you to translate for yourselves the threadbare theological terminology of this text into the vital facts that it represents, I should thank God Only, dear brethren, take this with you, either we forsake Christ because we love the world, or we forsake the world because we love Christ. On the one alternative we choose restlessness and feverish desires unsatisfied, and craving, all the misery of mistaking mist for land and cloud-wrack for solid ground; on the other, we choose all the blessedness of having set our love on that which satisfies, of having loved the worthiest, the best, the most loving. Which of the two shall we choose? It may be that the one choice shall mean, as it did for Paul, a prison cell and a martyrdom, and that the other may mean, as it did for Demas, comfort and safety, and many an unmistakably good thing, in some Thessalonica or other. But are we going to vote with Demas, or is it going to be Paul? Whether is it better to love the world, and get what the renegade presumably got for a time, or is it better to get what Paul speaks of in the words before my text, 'a crown of righteousness laid up for all them that love'—not the world—'but His appearing,' like the martyr Apostle.

II. Now look at that other portrait, Mark, the restored runaway. You remember the little that Scripture tells us about him, how he was chosen to be the personal attendant, private secretary, factotum, travelling agent, of Paul and Barnabas on their first journey, how his courage and faith lasted as long as the two missionaries were on familiar ground, on his native soil, in the island of Cyprus; and how when they crossed to the mainland both courage and faith oozed out at his finger ends, and he hurried back to his mother's house in Jerusalem. When Paul would go again with Barnabas, to visit the churches, the latter, with a relative's too great kindness which was cruelty, insisted on taking the runaway with them, and Paul, with hot indignation which was kinder than the misplaced affection of the uncle, steadfastly refused his consent. Then Barnabas and Mark slip out of the narrative and disappear, and long years pass during which we know nothing about them. But in time, somehow or other, things are made up; no doubt Mark was penitent. Therefore it was as right for Paul to forgive then, as it had been right for him before not to forgive.

It is very beautiful to notice that here he desires to have Mark for the very office which he had, in such shameful and cowardly fashion, flung up long years ago. For the book of Acts says, 'They had also John (Mark) to their minister,' and here Paul says, 'Bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry.' He was reinstating him in the very position which he had once abandoned.

Now what does Mark's restoration teach us? This great gospel, that from any departure, no matter how far, no matter with what aggravations attended, no matter for how long it has lasted, from any departure from duty and from Christ a man can come back. Those of us professing Christians who know ourselves best, and who fight most vigorously against the creeping encroachments of the love of the world, know best how often and how far we have yielded to them, and gone away from them. Brother, no matter how remote we have made ourselves from Him, we cannot travel beyond the reach of His seeking love. And the wisest thing we can do—and it is a possible thing for us all—is to go back to the beginning, and at the Cross to receive, what is never withheld, pardon for our lapses. Christ laid down the measure of human forgiveness when He said 'seventy times seven'—the two perfect numbers multiplied into themselves, and their product again multiplied by perfection; and are His love, and His placability, and His pardoning mercy less than that which He prescribed for us? Surely not. So we all may go back again, however far we have wandered, and must go back if we would not be swept into outer darkness for ever. The possibility of return, and, therefore, the blessed duty of repentance, is preached to all us imperfect Christians by this example before us.

I would also remind you how in the restored runaway, or rather in the Apostle's conduct to him, we see as I have already hinted, an adumbration, because a consequence of the divine forgiveness. Paul trusted this unreliable man at last. As the Acts of the Apostles says, 'He thought it not good to take him with them who had departed from the work,' and his severity was an instrument of cure far more effectual than Barnabas' flaccid good nature. The shrug of the shoulders that overlooks transgression and says, 'Oh! it does not matter,' is a much more cruel and a much less curative thing than the hot indignation which says, 'No, you have been unworthy, and until you repent there is no restoration possible.' That is how God does with us, not because He loves us less, but because He loves us more, and because He seeks to make thorough work, and to purge the bosom of the perilous stuff which, unless it is purged, will ever keep us from union with Him. Inasmuch as the law of the divine forgiveness is here set forth in the severity towards the impenitent, and in the generous confidence towards the penitent, and the restoration to his old office, let us Christian people learn our duty to those who have gone astray, and how there is no surer way of helping them to be reliable and profitable than showing them that we trust them to be both.

Still further, from out of this second of our portraits, there comes the other lesson, that failure in a task may tend to make us successful in it hereafter. Mark shirked the ministry; he became 'profitable for the ministry.' That is to say, though all sin weakens, yet sin repented and sin cast out may strengthen, because it may drive us nearer to God, because it may lead us to deeper humility, because it may kindle a livelier flame of gratitude, the gas that drives the engine, and because it may set us upon closer examination of our own selves, and putting up barriers at the weak places where the enemy poured in like a flood. So for all these reasons, in a far higher sense than the poet meant it, we may make stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things. There is no fatal entail of sin upon us, by which the past is always to set the time and prescribe the measure for the future. The Israelites fought two battles, on the same field, against the same foes, the fights at Aphek against the Philistines. In one of them they were ignominiously routed and beaten from the field; and in the other, on the same spot, against the same enemy, with the same weapons, the same men triumphed; and reared upon the field a memorial alike of their present victory and of their past defeat, and called it the Stone of Help, saying, 'Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.'

III. Lastly, we have here a third picture, that of the steadfast companion, Luke. 'Only Luke is with me,' and he had been with Paul for years, having joined him first at Troas, on the eve of his first missionary enterprise in Europe, having remained, as it appears, at Philippi whilst the Apostle traversed Greece, having rejoined him at Philippi on his return journey, travelled with him to Jerusalem, Cæsarea, in a shipwreck, in Rome in the first imprisonment, presumably during the interval; and now again we find him Paul's only companion, in the second imprisonment. He is a type of the steadfast souls who never stray, but by patient continuance in communion with Paul's Lord, 'go from strength to strength,' until 'every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' 'Abide with me,' says Paul's Master, and if we keep ourselves in the love of God, and resist the temptations to be drawn aside, steadfastly cleave unto the Lord, then the world will not have power over us, and we shall neither repeat the experience of the renegade, nor of the restored runaway, but find that day by day we grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord, and run with unwearied patience and perseverance the race that is set before us. A continuous development as the result of a quiet constancy of abiding with Jesus Christ is possible for us all. And if we do not come to it absolutely and with the completeness of the ideal, in our earthly experience, still we may approximate indefinitely towards it, and interruptions may become fewer and fewer and shorter and shorter, until what were broken dots, as it were, run into a continuous line, and we dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives.

Brethren! are we to be Demas? Are we to be Mark? Are we to be Luke? We may be all three. We have run away; we can go back; and thenceforward we can continue steadfast and immovable, cleaving to the Lord, and 'loving'—not the world, but—'His appearing.'

PAUL'S DYING CONFIDENCE

'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly Kingdom: to Him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.'—2 Tim. iv. 18.

If we leave out of notice for a moment the two or three salutations and personal messages which follow, these are the last words of Paul's last letter. So he disappears from history with this ringing cry of confidence upon his lips. There was enough in his circumstances to breed the very opposite disposition. He was half-way through his trial before Nero, and suspense, we all know, gnaws at the very roots of courage. He was all but absolutely certain that death was near, as he had said a minute before: 'I have finished my course; I have kept the faith; henceforth there is nothing but the crown to look for. His heart was wrung by the desertion of friends: Demas had forsaken him, and when the pinch of his trial came, and his head was, as it were, in the lion's open mouth, none of his friends plucked up heart of grace to stand beside him. But in spite of all, indomitable courage and a bright flame of hope, that nothing could blow or batter out, burned in the Apostle's heart still. Therefore he says, even while facing the block, 'the Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and preserve me unto His everlasting Kingdom.' He is so sure of this that he brings his thanks beforehand—'to whom be glory for ever and ever. The thing is as good as done; and so I render my praise.'

Note here a very striking trace and echo of—

I. Christ's words. I suppose you will often have observed that my text is a variation on the theme of the Lord's Prayer. That said, 'Deliver us from evil'; Paul says, 'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.' That, according to one form of Matthew's version, ends with the doxology: 'Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen.' Paul echoes that ascription of praise with his 'to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.' So we have here a little window through which we can see a wide prospect. For the gospels are later in date than Paul's letters, and the text shows that long before they were in existence the 'Lord's Prayer' was familiar, so that allusions to it were made tacitly, and would be recognised. This allusion is interesting in another point of view, in so far as it seems to prove that, in Paul's time, at any rate, the doxology was appended to the Lord's Prayer; and that, therefore, the fuller form of that prayer with the doxology is more original than the truncated form without it.

But passing from such considerations, let us note this word of Paul's as an instance of how his mind was saturated with the Lord's utterances. So it should be with us. Christ's words should have so entered into the very substance of our minds and thoughts as that we give them freely forth again, in other shapes and in other connections; and the sweetness of them, like that of some perfume diffused through else scentless air, shall make all our words and thoughts fragrant. Do you so summer and winter with the Master's words that they suggest themselves spontaneously to you often when you scarcely know that they are His, and that you speak them, not with formal quotation marks in front and behind, but in that allusive fashion, which indicates familiarity and the free use, in other combinations, of the great truths which He has spoken?

Notice, too, that Paul turned the prayer into confidence. In the prayer his Master had taught him to say, 'Deliver us from evil.' He had offered the petition, and therefore he had no more doubt than he had of his own existence or of Timothy's, that, having asked, he would receive. Therefore he is sure that 'the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work.' Is that how you treat your prayers? Are they worth treating so? Are they offered with such confidence as that you have any right to be sure that they will be answered? Are they offered with such submission as that you may well be certain of it; and do you wait, as this Apostle did, quietly expecting to have the answers? And are your eyes anointed to see the answers in things that some people might take to be the contradictions of them? Unless we have so moulded our petitions into assurances there is something wrong with them. If we pray aright, 'Deliver us from evil,' there will rise up in our hearts the quiet confidence, 'the Lord will deliver me from every evil work.'

Here we have a beautiful illustration of the true use of—

II. Past experience. Paul links two clauses together. He says, describing how these faint-hearted if not faithless friends had run away from him when the pinch of peril came, 'They all forsook me, but the Lord stood with me; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.' He looks back to that recent instance of Christ's protecting care and delivering might, and so he changes his tenses, and brings the light of the past to flood the darkness of the present, and to flash into the obscurity of the future, and he says, 'I was delivered . . . and the Lord will deliver me, from every evil.'

He has the same collocation of thoughts, as you may remember in another place where, speaking of other kinds of deliverances, he says that the Lord 'delivered him from so great a death'—that was in the past—'and doth deliver'—that is the thrilling consciousness that the same power is in the present as in the past; that to-day is no more prosaic and devoid of God than any yesterday; and then he adds, 'In whom we trust that He will deliver us.' Such is the true attitude for a Christian man. Experience is not meant only, as is too often its sole effect, to throw light upon the past, but also to flash a cheery beam on the else dim future; just as the eastern sky will sometimes throw a hint of its own glory upon the western heaven. To a Christian, every yesterday is a prophecy of a to-morrow that will be like it, and God's past is a pledge for God's future.

We, if we are truly trusting in Him, may have the prerogative which belongs to His children alone, of being absolutely certain that 'to-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' For there is nothing in the past, nothing in the miracles of former generations, nothing in the great deeds by which God has vindicated His protecting care over His people in the days that are gone, and nothing in the mercies and blessings and deliverances and immunities which we ourselves have received that is not available for to-morrow's consumption. The psalmist said, 'As we have heard so have we seen, in the City of our God.' The deeds of ancient days were repeated in the prosaic present.

And that is as true about the individual life as it is about the corporate life of the community. All of us, looking back to what God has done for us, may find therein the basis of the surest confidence that all that is but a specimen and pledge of what He will do. Nobody else but a Christian has the right to say, 'I have had this, that, and the other good; therefore I shall have it.' Rather, alas! a man that has wrenched himself away from God has to say sadly, 'I have had; therefore the likelihood is that I shall not have any more.'

Have you ever thought that the belief which we all have, and cannot get rid of, in the uniformity of nature, has no scientific basis? Everybody expects that the sun will rise to-morrow, and for a great many millions of years, perhaps the expectation is right; but there is coming a day when it will not rise. There is a last time—'positively the very last'—for everything in the world, and in the order of nature, and the expectation of permanence by which we guide our lives is, at bottom, absolutely unfounded, and yet there it is, and we have to act upon it. But you can give no rational explanation of it, and it will not always serve. There was once made a calculating machine. You turned a handle, and ground out a succession of numbers, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, etc., each increasing on the preceding by one. And after that had gone on for a long series the sequence was broken, and there came out a number which did not stand in the series at all. That is how God has made nature; grinding away for millions of years, and everything going in regular sequence; but then there comes a break, and the old order changeth. A day will come which is the last day. The sun will set and not rise again, and the world, and all there is in it, shall cease to be.

And as with nature, so with our little lives, and with the men that we trust to. We have no right to say, 'I have been delivered, and therefore shall be delivered,' unless we have the Lord, who is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever at the back of our confidence. For men's resources fail and men's dispositions change. If I have helped a man a hundred times, that is not a reason for my helping him the hundred and first time. I may get tired, or perhaps I have not the wherewithal, or circumstances alter. Continuity does not guarantee permanence. You can weary out the most patient patience, and chill the warmest love. And so we have to turn from all the limited and changeful grounds of confidence in ourselves, in others, in the order of things about us, and to acknowledge that we do not know what to-morrow is going to do for us. We have had a great many blessings, but the future may be beggared and bankrupt of them all, unless we can say, like Paul, 'the Lord delivered me, and the Lord will deliver me.' For His past is the parent and the prophecy of His present, and He does not let His resources be exhausted or His patience wearied or His love disgusted. Thou hast been with me in six troubles, says Job—art Thou tired of being with me?—'in the seventh Thou wilt not forsake me.' Thy past is the revelation of Thine eternal Self, and as Thou hast been so Thou wilt be. Christ, as the Incarnation of Divinity, lives, if I might use such a phrase, in a region that is high above the tenses of our verbs, in one eternal now, far below which, Past, Present, and Future, as we know them, are like the little partitions in our fields, which from the mountain-top melt away into invisibility, and do not divide the far-reaching plain.

Travellers see, in deserted, ancient cities, half-hewn statues, with one part polished and the rest rough, and the block not detached from the native rock. They were meant to be carried by the subjects of some forgotten king to build up some unfinished and never-to-be-finished temple or palace. There are no half-finished works in God's workshop; no pictures begun and uncompleted in Christ's studio: and so we can go to Him with the old prayer of the psalmist: 'The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever; forsake not the work of Thine own hands.'

Lastly, we have here a great lesson of how—

III. A man close to death may think of it, 'The Lord will deliver me.' Did He? 'The Lord will save me . . . into His everlasting kingdom.' Was that a mistake on Paul's part? Very soon after he wrote these words, perhaps even before the winter against the cold of which he asked Timothy to bring his one cloak that he had left at Troas, he was again brought before the Emperor, and then was led outside the walls of Rome, where a gorgeous church now bears his name, and there, according to tradition, was decapitated. Yes; that was just what he expected. For, as I have already pointed out, a verse or two before my text says, 'I have finished my course.' And yet, with the certainty that Death was close by him, he lifts up this ringing song of triumph, 'The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me into His heavenly Kingdom.' He expected that deliverance and saving into the Kingdom to be accomplished precisely by the fact of his death.

A man who has a firm grip of Christ's hand sees all things differently from him who has no such stay. If Jesus is standing by us, and strengthening us, we can look with a smile at the worst that Nero can do, and can tell even the executioner: 'You do not mean it; do you know what you are doing? You think you are inflicting evil upon me. You are delivering me from every evil.' Death is the great emancipator from all manner of evil, be it the evil of sorrows or the evil of their parent sins. And he who rightly understands the operation of that, the last of earthly incidents, understands that it is, in the fullest sense, the smiting off of his chains, and the lifting of him up high into a region where no malaria of evil can ever rise.

Death is not merely to be looked at on the side of what it takes a man away from, but on the side of what it introduces him to. 'He shall deliver me from every evil'; that is much, but it might be effected by crushing the man's consciousness and annihilating him. Bare exemption and escape from the ills that flesh is heir to are not all the choice gifts with which Death comes laden. In his bony left hand is the gift of deliverance from all evil. In his right there is the positive gift of participation in all good. 'He shall deliver me from evil, and shall save me into His everlasting Kingdom.' And so that grim form is the porter at the gate, who ushers the man who has hoped in Christ into the royalty of His presence.

Mark that here, for the only time in Scripture, we have the expression, the 'heavenly Kingdom.' Why? Because Paul knew and felt that he was in the Kingdom already, and so he could not say barely that Christ through death was going to save him into the Kingdom. He was already there, but just because he was, therefore the last enemy assumed this friendly and familiar form to him, and was sure to bring him into the heavenly form of the Kingdom, of whose earthly form he was already a subject. If—and only if—you are in the Kingdom here, can you quietly look forward and be sure that the Lord, when He sends His messenger, will send Him to do the double work of delivering you out of all evil, and ushering you into all glory of good.

TITUS

CHRISTIANS MAKING THE GOSPEL BEAUTIFUL

. . . That they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.
Titus ii. 10.

THAT is a wonderful hope to hold forth before any man, that he may add beauty to the gospel. And it is still more wonderful when we remember that these words were originally addressed to a handful of slaves—the lowest of the population, whose lives were passed in sordid squalor; whose duties were narrow and often repulsive, and yet they in their limited sphere and lowly lot might make fairer the truth which is already beautiful with all the beauty of God.

I. Let us then think for a moment of this wonderful possibility that is opened out here before every Christian, that he may add beauty to the gospel.

He may paint the lily and gild the refined gold; for men do quite rightly and legitimately judge of systems by their followers. It would not be a fair thing to test a philosophy or a body of political or scientific truth by the conduct and character of the men who professed it; but it is a perfectly fair thing, under certain conditions and in certain limits, to test a system of practical morality, which professes to do certain things with people's character and conduct, by its professors. It is just as fair, when a creed comes before our notice which assumes to influence men's conduct, to say: 'Well, I should like to see it working,' as it is for any of you mill-owners to say, when a man comes to you with a fine invention upon paper, 'Have you got a working model of it? Has it ever been tried? What have been the results that have been secured by it?' Or as it would be to say to anybody that claimed to have got a 'medicine that will cure consumption,' to say: 'Have you any cases? Can you quote any cures?' So when we Christians stand up and say, 'We have a faith which is able to deaden men's minds to the world; which is able to make them unselfish; which is able to lift them up above cares and sorrows; which is able to take men and transform their whole nature, and put new desires and hopes and joys into them'; it is quite fair for the world to say: 'Have you? Does it? Does it do so with you? Can you produce your lives as working models of Christianity? Can you produce your cure as a proof of the curative power of the gospel that you profess?'

So, dear friends, this possibility does lie before all Christian men, that they may by their lives conciliate prejudices, prepare people to listen favourably to the message of God's love, win over men from their antagonism, and make them say: 'Well, after all, there is something in that Christianity.'

It is not altogether and without limitation a fair thing to do to argue back from the lives of disciples to the truth of the creed, because all men are worse than their principles; and because, too, though a Christian man's goodness ought to be put down to the credit of his creed, a Christian man's badness ought to be put down to the debit of himself. But somehow or other the world, when it sees Christian people that do not live up to the level of their profession, does say, how-over illogically, both of two things, both of which cannot be true; first of all, 'A pretty kind of Christians these are!' and second, 'There cannot be much in the system that produces such!' One or other of the two things they ought to say. They ought either to say: 'You are a hypocrite!' or they ought to say: 'Your Christianity is not worth much!' But, illogically enough, they generally say both. And so you both damage yourselves in their eyes, and damage the religion you profess, by your inconsistencies and your faults.

Our lives ought to be like the mirror of a reflecting telescope. The astronomer does not look directly up into the sky when he wants to watch the heavenly bodies, but down into the mirror on which their reflection is cast. And so our little, low lives down here upon earth should so give back the starry bodies and infinitudes above us that some dim eyes, which peradventure could not gaze into the violet abysses with their lustrous points, may behold them reflected in the beauty of our life. The doctrines of Christianity, when they are only in words, are less fair than the same truths when they are embodied in a life. It is beautiful to say: 'If ye love Me keep My commandments'; but the beauty of the words is less than when they are illustrated in a life. Our lives should be like the old missals, where you find the loving care of the monastic scribe has illuminated and illustrated the holy text, or has rubricated and gilded some of the letters. The best Illustrated Bible is the conduct of the people who profess to take it for their guide and law.

II. So much, then, for the first point. the wondrous possibility that is opened in this text. Now let me say a word about the other side—the solemn alternative.

If you look at the context you will see that a set of exhortations preceding these to the slaves, which are addressed to the wives, end with urging as the great motive to the conduct enjoined, 'that the Word of God be not blasphemed.' That is the other side of the same thought as is in my text. The issues of the conduct of professing Christians are the one or other of these two, either to add beauty to the gospel or to cause the Word of God to be blasphemed. If you do not the one you will be doing the other. If my life is not throwing back honour upon the gospel from which it manifestly flows, and by which it is manifestly moulded, it will be throwing back discredit. Your lives, professing Christians, are not neutral in their effect upon men's estimate of your creed. Either you attract or repel. The one pole of the magnet or the other you do present. Either you make men think better of God's truth, or you make them think worse of it. There are no worse enemies of the gospel than its inconsistent friends. That is especially true in lands where the Christian Church is a little band amongst heathens, as was the case with the churches of which Titus had charge. Who is it that thwarts missionary work in India? Englishmen. Who is it that, wherever they go with their ships, put a taunt into the lips of the enemy which Christian workers find it hard to meet? English sailors. The notorious dissipation and immorality amongst the representatives of English commerce in the various Eastern centres of trade puts a taunt into the mouth of the abstemious Hindu and of the Chinaman. 'These are your Christians, are they?' England, that sends out missionaries in the cabin, and Bibles and rum side by side amongst the cargo, has to listen, and her people have to take to themselves the awful words with which the ancient Jewish inconsistencies were rebuked: 'Through you the name of God is blasphemed amongst the Gentiles.'

And in less solemn manner perhaps, but just as truly, here, in a so-called Christian land, the inconsistencies, the selfishness, the worldliness of professing Christian people, the absolute absence of all apparent difference between them and the most godless man in the same circumstances, are the things which perhaps more than anything else counteract the evangelistic efforts of the Christian Church. What is the good of my one voice preaching, if so many live in diametrical opposition to that which has been preached? One man pulls one way for twenty-five minutes, and hundreds pull the other way for a week; which will pull the most? If the Christian Church, and we as members of it, were living as we ought to do, and as we might do, far more than all eloquent teaching would be the result of our simple lives of transparent godliness. My brother! I bring to each of you the very solemn question: Do you repel or attract? You have, perhaps, children. Are they favourably disposed to Christianity because of what they see in the lives of their father and mother? or do your inconsistencies, which the sharp eyes that see you in your easy moments at home cannot but notice however loving they may be, drive them away and disgust them with a profession of religion, and with religion itself?

You have friends and acquaintances, and a circle whom you influence. Do you influence them to look with favour upon that Word which has made you what you are? Or do you turn them away from it?

Remember, remember, either you beautify or you blaspheme the gospel by your conduct.

III. Once more, let me ask you to consider the sort of life that will thus commend and adorn the gospel.

First of all it must be a life conspicuously and uniformly under the influence of Christian principles. I put emphasis upon these two words 'conspicuously' and 'uniformly.' You will be of very little use if your Christian principle is so buried in your life, embedded beneath a mass of selfishness and worldliness and indifference as that it takes a microscope, and a week's looking for to find it. And you will be of very little use, either, if your life is by fits and starts under the influence of Christian principle; a minute guided by that and ten minutes guided by the other thing;—if here and there, sprinkled thinly over the rotting mass, there be a handful of the saving salt. We want uniformity and we want conspicuousness of Christian principle in our lives if they are to be a power to witness for our Master.

And remember, too, as the context teaches us, that the lives which commend and adorn the doctrine must be such as manifest Christian principle in the smallest details. These slaves, in their smoky huts, with their little tasks, and by the exercise of very homely virtues, were to 'adorn the doctrine.' Do you ever notice what it is that Paul tells them to do that they *may* 'adorn the doctrine'? Here is the list—'Obedient to their masters, not answering again, not purloining but showing all good fidelity.' Very homely virtues; there is nothing at all lofty or transcendent or above the pedestrian level of a prosaic life in that. Obedience, keeping a civil tongue in their heads in the midst of provocation, not indulging in petty pilfering, being true to the trust that was given to them. 'That is no great thing,' you may say, but in these little things they were to adorn the great doctrine of God their Saviour. Ay! the smallest duties are in some sense the largest sphere for the operation of great principles. For it is the little duties which by their minuteness tempt men to think that they can do them without calling in the great principles of conduct, that give the colour to every life after all. You can write the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments in the space of a threepenny bit; you can make all the beauty and all the sanctifying power of the gospel visible and manifest within the narrow circle of the smallest duties that the lowest station has to perform. The little banks of mud in the wheel-tracks in the road are shaped upon the same slopes, and moulded by the same law that carves the mountains and lifts the precipices of the Himalayas. And a handful of snow in the hedge in the winter time will fall into the same curves, and be obedient to the same great physical laws which shape the glaciers that lie on the sides of the Alps. You do not want big things in order, largely and nobly, to manifest big principles. The smallest duties, distinctly done for Christ's sake, will adorn the doctrine:—

'A servant, with this clause,
Makes drudgery divine;
Who sweeps a house as by Thy laws
Makes that and the calling fine.'

'Adorn the doctrine of God in *all* things.'

And then again, I may say that the manner of life which commends the gospel will be one conspicuously above the level of the morality of the class to which you belong. These slaves were warned not to fall into the vices that were proper to their class, in order that by not falling into them, and so being unlike their fellows, they might glorify the gospel. For the things that Paul warns them not to do are the faults which all history and experience tell us are exactly the vices of the slave—petty pilfering, a rank tongue blossoming into insolent speech, a disregard of the master's interests, sulky disobedience or sly evasion of the command. These are the kind of things that the devilish institution of slavery makes almost necessary on the part of the slave, unless some higher motive and loftier principle come in to counteract the effects.

And in like manner all of us have, in the class to which we belong, and the sort of life which we have to live, certain evils natural to our position; and unless you are unlike the non-Christian men of your own profession and the people that are under the same worldly influence as you are—unless you are unlike them in that your righteousness exceeds their righteousness, 'Ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven.' My brother, if you and the godless man whose warehouse is up the same staircase pursue your business on the same maxims, have the same ideas as to what is desirable, press towards the same end, take the same short cuts through some morality in order to reach it, what is the good of your saying you are a Christian? If there is no difference between you and them, to your advantage and to the advantage of the gospel that you profess, say no more about your being dead to the world by the Cross of Christ, and living for higher and other motives.

If you are to adorn the doctrine you must conspicuously and uniformly, in great things and in small things, be living by other laws than those obey who believe not the doctrine. Unless it can be said of us: 'There is a people here whose laws are different from all people that be on the earth,' we shall never beautify the gospel of Christ.

And now one last word. How is such a manner of life to be attained? I know of only one way, and that is by continually living near Jesus Christ. If we are to beautify Him, He must first beautify us. If we are to adorn the doctrine, the doctrine must adorn us. That is to say, it is only when we live near Him, are in constant touch of His hand, and communion with His spirit, it is only then that His beauty shall pass into our faces, and that beholding the glory of the Lord 'we shall be changed into the same image from glory to glory.' We must be on the mountain like Moses in fellowship with our Master, if we are to come down and walk amongst men with radiance streaming from our countenance, so as that all that look upon us shall behold our face 'as it had been the face of an angel.' 'Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord; this people have I formed for Myself, they shall show forth My praise.'

THE SCHOOL OF GRACE

'The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching . . .'—TITUS ii. 11, 12.

THE Apostle has been giving fatherly admonitions as to very elementary pieces of morality, addressed to both sexes, and to all ages. He winds up with inculcating on Christian slaves some obvious duties, such as obedience and honesty. In my text he bases all these on what was to him the motive and the power for all sorts of righteous living—viz., the fact of Christ's mission. The 'for' with which my text begins carries with it the whole relation between Christian thinking and Christian action, and shows us that the loftiest truths are then most honoured when they are brought to bear on the lowliest duties. Slaves are not to pilfer nor wrangle, 'for the grace that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching.'

Now there are two remarks that I must make of an expository kind in order to come to the understanding of the words before us. One is that the collocation in our Authorised Version, 'hath appeared to all men,' is not what Paul means, but these last words, 'to all men,' should be connected with the previous ones, 'that bringeth salvation.' It is not part of his purpose to declare, what was not in fact true then, and is not true now, that the grace of God has appeared to all men, but it was part of his purpose to declare that that grace brings salvation to all men, howsoever the present range of its manifestation may historically be contracted. The other remark that I would make is that 'teaching' is by no means a sufficiently comprehensive expression to cover the Apostle's thought, for the word which he employs, whilst it does mean the communication of instruction, carries with it inseparably the other ideas of correcting faults and of chastisement. It is the same which is used in the well-known words, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' So that what the Apostle says here is that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, *schooling*, or *training*, or *disciplining*.

I. Let us, then, first look at the **appearance of the grace.**

Now that word 'grace' played a much larger part in the thoughts of our fathers than it does in ours;

and I am not sure that many things are more needed by the ordinary Christian of this generation than that he should rediscover the amplitude and the majesty of that old-fashioned and unfashionable word. For what does 'grace' mean? It means a self-originated love. Grace is love that has no motive but itself. Grace is a self-motived love that is in full energetic exercise. Grace is a self-motived, ever-acting love that delights to impart. Grace is a self-motived, ever-acting, communicating love which bends in tenderness over and floods with gifts those that stand far beneath itself. Grace is a self-motived, ever-acting, communicating, and stooping love which brings in its hands the gift of forgiveness, and deals with those on whom it lavishes this tenderness, not according to their merits, but according to the pulsations of its own heart. And thus grace is the shorthand word for the self-motived, ever-acting, communicating, stooping, and pardoning mercy which has its very home and throne in the heart of God Himself. It is this galaxy of stars blended into one diffused light, and yet capable of being resolved into so many suns, which the Apostle here says 'hath appeared.' He uses a most significant and picturesque word, for it is the expression which is proper to describe the raying out in the heavens of its great lights, and in the only place in Scripture in which it is applied to physical things is in reference to the sun and stars which, clouded by tempest, for many days did not 'appear,' nor could beam their sweet light on the darkened earth. In all other cases where the word is employed it has a definite and plain meaning. It always refers to the coming of Jesus Christ, either his first coming in the Incarnation, or his second coming to Judgment. That manifestation is the raying out, as it were, of a sun, which has been obscured by the mists of sin, rising from the undrained swamps of our own hearts, and it pours itself down upon the mists; and thins them away until its radiant light is spread over all the glittering and rejoicing earth.

So the Apostle has a definite meaning, and points to a definite historical fact, when he declares that, in the Person and life of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, all this self-originated, active, communicating stooping, pardoning love finds its highest manifestation. The fire-mist, if I might so say, which was diffused through a chaotic universe, is gathered together into a sun, and it blazes down upon the world.

Now, of course, that conception of the life of Jesus Christ as the appearance of the grace of God rests upon the other belief that Jesus Christ has a special and unique relation to the God whose love He manifests. And this is the point of view from which the approaching Christmas festival has to be regarded by Christian people. Unless we can say, 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' we cannot go on to say, 'We beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' Christmas celebrates not merely the birth of a man: but the Incarnation of a God. The 'grace that bringeth salvation to all men hath *appeared*.' Ay, there is the great peculiarity, there are the power and the blessedness of Christianity in its teaching, that now we no longer need to grope after God, searching painfully for traces of His footsteps in the maze of the world's history, or consulting the ambiguous oracles of nature, or looking for Him in the intuitions of our own hearts, our hopes and fears, but that we can turn to historical facts and say, 'Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us.' The day of peradventures is past, when we listen to his 'Verily! verily! I say unto you . . . he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'

> 'And so the Word was flesh, and wrought
> With human hands the creed of creeds;
> In loveliness of perfect deeds,
> Higher than all poetic thought.'

'The grace of God hath appeared.'

II. Note the gift of the grace.

It 'bringeth salvation to all men.' Now I suppose one reason which recommended what I have already designated as an erroneous connection of words in our Authorised Version is the difficulty of believing in the face of facts that Christ, in His character of the embodied grace of God, did bring salvation to all men. But the explanation of the seeming difficulty is not to be found in twisting the words out of their proper order, but in understanding the words in the order in which they occur. For when the Apostle says that this grace brings salvation unto all, he does not say that all receive the salvation which is brought to them. There is a whole world of difference between the two expressions. And the word that he employs—for it is *one* word in the original which is rendered in our Version by the three 'that bringeth salvation'—does not describe an actuality, but a potentiality and a possibility. The aim and purpose, not the realised effect, is what is pointed out in this great word of our text.

For there is a condition necessary from the very nature of the case. If God could save all men, be sure that He would do it; the love that thus takes its rise in the councils of Eternity, and flows on for ever through the waste and barren ages of human history, and is ever waiting to bestow itself, in its tenderness and in its liberality upon all men, is not made less universal, but it is conditioned by the nature of the gift that it brings. Salvation cannot be flung broadcast and indiscriminately upon all men of all sorts, whatever their relation to God. If it could, be sure that it would be. But just because it is a deep and inward thing, affecting men's moral and religious state, and not only their position in regard to some future hell, it cannot be given thus broadcast, it must be sown in the fitting places. The one thing that is requisite, and it is indispensably requisite, is that I shall trust Him who brings salvation, and, trusting Him, shall take it out of His hand. If the medicine stands on the shelf, in the bottle with the stopper in, the sick man will not be cured. That is not the fault of the medicine; it is a panacea, but no remedy can work where it is not applied. This great ocean of the divine love goes, as it were, feeling along the black cliffs that front it, for some cranny into which it may pour itself, but the obstinate rock can fling it all back in impotent spray. Though the whole Atlantic surges against the cliff, it is dry an inch inwards. Thus the universality of the gift, the universal potency of the gift, is not in the slightest degree affected by the fact that, where it is not taken, its benefits are not realised. Have you shut your hearts to it, or have you opened them?

Paul recognised that this grace of God came with a gift that was meant for everybody, mainly because he knew that it had come with a gift that had done what it aimed at for him. Like every true Christian man, he felt, as you and I ought to feel, that if it were able to save me it is able to save anybody, and that if it can cast out my faults and sins, though I may not have fallen into gross sins, or what the world calls crimes, there is no man whose iniquities will foil it. 'Of whom I am chief' is not an exaggeration, but it is the verdict of an honest conscience that knows the inside of one man, at all events, and knows how much of his surface innocence is deceptive, and how much of it is due not to himself, but to circumstances.

> 'The arms of love that compassed me
> Would all mankind embrace.'

You know, some of you, that He has cleansed you. You know that He would have cleansed you more completely if you had let Him; and, knowing that, can you doubt that He would cleanse everybody?

The universality of the gift is manifest in the fact that it addresses itself only to needs which belong to every man, for the deepest of all needs is the need that our relations to God shall be set right, and that we shall be delivered from the bondage and the tyranny of our sins.

And that universal potentiality and universal aim are still further written in unmistakable characters upon the mission and work of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it requires only, as its condition, that which all men can render. For if it had been meant for sections it would have called for qualifications which only classes can possess. If our understanding had been the organ for receiving the truth, it would have been a gospel for the wise men of the world, and the wayfaring man, the fool, would have been shut out. But now there is but the one condition of trust in the one omnipotent grace, and since all men, if they would, could put forth a believing hand, the very condition, instead of being a limitation, is a demonstration of the universality of the gift.

We have to look out over all the world, the outcasts, the slum-dwellers, the barbarian races, and as the main thought about them, to cherish the undying assurance that not one of them but is capable of being lifted by the grace of God from the depths into which they have fallen. That is not the way in which people look at 'the dangerous classes' of civilisation and at the savage races outside its pale. Some of us are looking now at the latter mainly as beasts of burden, and hoping to exploit their muscles in the search after wealth and glory. Jesus Christ looks at them, and you and I ought to look at them, as possible candidates for the elevating influences of His grace. There is no metal so hard but, cast into that furnace of love, it will melt and flow. There is no reed so broken and trampled into the mud but that His gracious hands, with His deft and loving gentleness of touch, can bind it up and make it whole, and make it blossom. And there is no foulness so black but that this detergent can wash it white. There is no man on the face of the earth, nor ever has been, so brutalised but that, by the grace of God, he may be deified, made 'partaker of a divine nature.' Grace 'brings salvation to all men.'

III. Lastly, let me point you to the discipline of the Grace.

As I have already said, 'teaching' here implies not only the communication of instruction, either outwardly or inwardly, but also a disciplinary process of correction that includes necessarily chastisement. Jesus Christ comes to us, and brings the external means of communicating instruction in the record of His life in this book. And He comes to us, also doing what no other teacher can do, for He passes into our spirits, and communicates not only instruction but the

Spirit which teaches them in whom it abides, and guides them with gentle illumination into 'all truth' concerning God, Christ, and themselves, which it is needful for them to know.

Nor does His work stop there, for He corrects and rebukes.

Nor does His work stop there, for as He Himself has said, 'As many as I love, I rebuke *and chasten.*' He comes 'with a rod' sometimes, but always 'in the spirit of meekness.' He uses not only inward but also outward chastisements. The knife mercilessly cuts away the tender, pliant tendrils of the vine, and the sap bleeds out at the wound, but the life does not; and the result of the pruning is larger and mellower clusters, ruddy in the sunlight and full of generous juice. So be sure of two things, dear friends, that it is grace which chastens, that the knife is held by a loving hand, and that the purpose of our outward sorrows, as well as of our inward discipline, is 'that we may be partakers of His holiness.' That grace is not like some unskilful surgeon, who cuts so deep that, in the effort to remove the tumour, he kills the sufferer; but His surgery knows to a hairsbreadth where to stop, and when the incision has served its purpose.

'The grace of God hath appeared disciplining.' Disciplining? What for? Is the discipline to be sedulously carried on for threescore years and ten, and there an end? If we will only think of life as Christ's school, we shall understand it better than from any other point of view; and be certain that all these capacities, which are imparted and unfolded and trained by us, exercised here, will find a better field beyond. Jesus Christ, the embodied Grace, has appeared to us. He prays us with much entreaty to receive His gift. If we will enroll ourselves in His school, and learn His lessons, and accept His corrections, and submit to His chastisements as tokens of His love and of His desire that we shall bear better fruit, then, as schoolboys say, we shall 'get our remove' when we are ready for it, and go up into the top form. And there not only Grace but Glory will be our teacher, and we shall learn from the Glory more than ever on earth we learned from the Grace.

THE PURPOSE OF GRACE

'That, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.'—TITUS ii. 12.

To appreciate the full force of these words, we must observe that they are the Apostle's statement of the ultimate design of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and of all the wonderful powers and gifts which Christ brought with Him. In our text, the end for which that grace has appeared and exercises its corrective discipline is defined. It comes '*in order that*, denying ungodliness, and worldly lusts, we should live soberly righteously, and godly.'

Now, remember that Paul thought that the life and the death of Jesus Christ were the most stupendous of miracles, nothing less than the entrance of divinity in a human form into the limitations of our lives, and His participation in the darkness of our deaths. Remember that he believed that Jesus Christ's coming had led to a continual gift of an actual divine life to men who trusted Him; then you will see the grandeur and significance of the words of my text. What has this divine miracle of mercy been for? Nothing but this, to help men here to-day to live good lives. If there were no future at all, says Paul, the expenditure of the divine love is amply vindicated. The sun does not disdain to shine in order to ripen the vegetables in the humble cottage garden, and the love of God did not conceive that it had too small an object to warrant all that lavish gift which is in Christ, in helping us to live as becomes us. How dear we must be to God, and how infinitely important in His eyes must conduct and character be if such an abundance and variety of divine influences were set in motion to produce such an effect! Now, the first thing that strikes me about these words is the fair picture that they draw of what every life should be; and next, the hard conditions which they impose upon men who would live so; and then, what God has given us to make such lives possible. So I ask you to look at these three points.

I. The fair picture of what our lives should be.

Paul is saying nothing more than conscience, reason, the instincts of men everywhere endorse. His requirements in the rough division of virtues which he adopts, not for scientific accuracy but for practical force, are really said 'Amen!' to by every honest conscience. 'Soberly, righteously, godly'—that is what everybody, if he will be fair with himself, feels to be the sort of life he ought to live. Let me just touch upon these three things very briefly. They may be said, roughly, though not very accurately, perhaps, to cover the ground of a man's duties to himself, to his neighbours, and to God.

'Soberly'—that is what you owe to your own nature. 'Righteously'—that is what you owe to people round you. 'Godly'—that is what you owe to Him. I need not explain, I suppose, that the word 'soberly' has by no means the narrow signification which the besetting vice of England has given to it now—viz., abstinence from, or a very restrained use of, intoxicating liquors; nor even the wider one of a curbing of the desires of sense. But the meaning may be better represented by *self-control* than by any other rendering. Now if there were no man in the world but myself, and if I had no thought or knowledge of God, and if there were no other standard to which I ought to conform, I should have, in my own nature, with its crowd of desires, tastes, inclinations, and faculties, plain indication that self-government was essential. For human nature is not constituted on the plan of a democracy or an ochlocracy—a mob rule—but there is a clear hierarchy and order of predominance in it; and, as plainly as a ship is made to need a rudder, so plainly on your make is there stamped the necessity for rigid self-control.

For we all carry with us desires, inclinations, appetites—some of them directly connected with our physical frame, and some of them a little more refined—which are mere blind inclinations to a given specific good, and will be stirred up, apart altogether from the question of whether it is expedient or right to gratify them. To a hungry man the odour of food is equally enticing, whether the food belongs to himself or his neighbour; and if he had to steal for it, it would still tempt him. Because, then, we are to a large extent made up of blind desires which take no account of anything except their appropriate food, the commandment comes from the deepest recesses of each nature, as well as from the great throne in the heavens—'Live soberly.' The engines will work on all the same, though the bows of the ship be turned to the rocks, and driving straight on the reef. It is the engineer's business to start them and keep them going; it is their business to turn the screw; it is somebody else's business to look after the navigation. We have our 'humours under lock and key' in order that we may control them. And if we do not, we shall go all to rack and ruin. So, 'live soberly,' says Paul.

The next requirement is, 'righteously.' Now, I said that that might, perhaps, be roughly explained as referring mainly to our duties to one another. But that is not by any means an exhaustive—and perhaps, a scarcely approximate—description. For the attitude expressed in 'righteously' does not so much point to other people as to the existence of a certain standard, external to ourselves, to which it is our business and wisdom to conform. I said that, if there were nothing in the world except a man and his own nature, the duty of sober self-government would necessarily arise. But the supposed isolation does not exist. We stand in certain relations to a whole universe of things and of people, and there does rise before every man, however it may be accounted for, or explained away, or tampered with, or neglected, a standard of right and wrong. And what Paul here means by 'live righteously' is, 'Do as you know you ought to do,' and in shaping your character, have reference not merely to its constitution, but to its relations to all this universe of outside facts.

So far as the word may include our duty to others, I may just remind you that 'righteousness' in reference to our fellows demands mercy. The common antithesis which is drawn between a just man who will give everybody what they deserve, and not one scrap more nor less if he can help it, and a kindly man is erroneous, because every man has a claim upon every other man for lenient judgment and undeserved help. He may not deserve it, being such a man as he is; but he has a right to it, being a man at all. And no man is righteous who is not merciful. We do not fulfil the prophet's exhortation, 'do justice,' unless we fulfil his other, 'love mercy.' For mercy is the right of all men.

The last of the phases under which the perfect life is represented here takes us up at once into another region. If there were nobody but myself in the world, it must be my duty to live controlling myself; since I stand in relations manifold to creatures manifold and to the whole order of things, it is my duty to conform to the standard, and to do what is right. And just as plainly as the obligations to sobriety and righteousness press on every man, so plainly is godliness necessary to his perfection. For I am not only bound by ties which knit me to my fellows, or to this visible order, but the closest of all bonds, the most real of all relations, is that which binds us each to God.

And if 'man's chief end be to glorify God,' and then and thus, 'to enjoy Him for ever,' then that end, in its very nature, must be all pervasive, and diffuse its sweetness into the other two. For you cannot sliver up the unity of life into little sections and say, 'This deed has to be done soberly, and that one righteously, and this one godly,' but godliness must cover the whole life, and be the power of self-control and of righteousness. 'All in all or not at all.' Godliness must be uniform and universal. Lacking their supreme beauty are the lives of all who endeavour to keep these other two departments of duty and forget this third. There are many men—I have no doubt there are some of them among us—punctiliously trying to control their natures, and to live righteously; but all their thoughts run along the low levels, and they are absolutely blind and deaf to voices and sights from heaven. They are like some of those truncated pyramids, broad-based upon the solid earth, and springing with firm lines to a certain height, and then coming to a dead stop, and so being but stumps, which leave a sense of incompleteness, because all the firm lines have not gathered themselves up into the sky-piercing point which aspires still higher than it has reached. 'Soberly,' that is much; 'righteously,' that is more; 'godly,' that is, not *most*, but *all*.

II. Secondly, notice what a hard task the man has who will live so.

The Apostle, very remarkably, puts first, in my text, a negative clause. The things that he says we are to deny are the exact opposites of the characteristics that he says we are to aim after. 'Denying ungodliness'—that is clearly the opposite of 'godly'; and 'worldly lusts,' though perhaps not so obviously, yet certainly is the antithesis of 'soberly' and 'righteously.' I need not remind you, I suppose, that the word 'lusts' here has not the carnal associations cleaving to it which have gradually accrued to it in the changes of language since our translation was made, but that it implies simply 'desires,' longings, of however refined and incorporeal a sort, which attach themselves to the fleeting things of this life. Pride, ambition, and all the more refined and less sensual desires are as much included as the grossest animalism in which any swine of a man can wallow. Worldly lusts are desires which say to earth, and to what earth can give, in any of its forms, 'Thou art my god, and having thee I am satisfied.'

Now, says Paul, there is no good to be done in the matter of acquiring these positive graces, without which a life is contemptible and poor, unless, side by side with the continual effort at the acquisition of the one, there be the continual and resolute effort at the excision and casting out of the other. Why? Because they are in possession. A man cannot be godly unless he casts out the ungodliness that cleaves to his nature; nor can he rule himself and seek after righteousness unless he ejects the desires that are in possession of his heart. You have to get rid of the bad tenant if you would bring in the good one. You have to *turn* the current, which *is* running in the wrong direction. And so it comes to be a very hard, painful thing for a man to acquire these graces of which my text speaks. People talk as if what was needed was the cultivation of what we have. Aye! that is needed; but there is something else than that needed. You have to turn out a great deal of bad in order to make room for the good. Not that the evil can be expelled without the entrance of the good, as I shall have to say in a moment. But still the two things must go on side by side.

And so it is hard work for a man to grow better. If we had only to advance in practice, or knowledge, or sentiment, or feeling, that would not be so difficult to do; but you have to reverse the action of the machine; and that is hard. Can it be done? Who is to keep the keepers? It is difficult for the same self to be sacrifice and priest. It is a hard matter for a man to crucify himself, and we may well say, if there can be no progress in goodness without this violent and thorough mutilation and massacre of the evil that *is* in us, alas! for us all. I am sure, as sure as I stand here, that there are plenty of young men and women among my hearers now who have tried once and again, and have failed once and again, to 'live soberly, righteously, and godly,' because the evil that is in them has been too strong for them.

III. I come, lastly, on the strength of that grand first word of my text, 'in order that,' to remind you of what God gives us to make such life possible.

'The grace of God, that bringeth salvation to all men, hath appeared disciplining us,' for this purpose, that the things which are impossible with men may be possible with God. Christ and His love; Christ and His life; Christ and His death; Christ and His Spirit; in these are new hopes, motives, powers, which avail to do the thing that no man can do. An infant's finger cannot reverse the motion of some great engine. But the hand that made it can touch some little tap or lever, and the mighty masses of polished iron begin to move the other way. And so God, and God only, can make it possible for us to deny ourselves ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to 'live soberly, righteously, godly, in this present world.' That Jesus who comes to us to mould our hearts into hitherto unfelt love, by reason of His own great love, and who gives to us His own Spirit to be the life of our lives, gives us by these gifts new motives, new powers, new tastes, new affections. He puts the reins into our hands, and enables us to control and master our unruly tempers and inclinations. If you want to clear out a tube of any sort, the way to do it is to insert some solid substance, and push, and that drives out the clogging matter. Christ's love coming into the heart expels the evil, just as the sap rising in the tree pushes off the old leaves that have hung there withered all the winter. As Luther used to say, 'You cannot clean out the stable with barrows and shovels. Turn the Elbe into it.' Let that great flood of life pour into our hearts, and it will not be hard to 'live soberly.'

He comes to help us to live 'righteously.' He gives us His own life to dwell in our hearts, in no mere metaphor, but in simple fact. And they who trust in Jesus Christ are righteous by no mere fiction of a righteousness reckoned, but by the blessed reality of a righteousness imparted.

He comes to make it possible for us to live 'godly.' For He, and He alone, has the secret of drawing hearts to God; because He, and He alone, has opened the secret of God's heart to us. As long as we think of that Father in the heavens as demanding and commanding, we shall not love Him, nor serve Him, nor live 'godly.' 'I knew thee that thou wast an austere man . . . therefore I was afraid, and hid my talent in the earth.' But when we learn that 'God' and 'Love' spell with the same letters, and that He gives us in Christ the power to be what He commands us to become, then our spirits are stirred into thankful obedience.

So, dear friends, you that have been, as I am sure many of you have been, trying over and over again to mend yourselves, and have failed, listen to this gospel. You that have been sitting at the foot of the mountain, and seeing the shining towers of the fair palace-temple on its summit, and have made two or three feeble and foiled efforts to reach it, and then have fallen back again, do not despair or fancy that the heights are inaccessible. Trust yourselves to Christ, and let His life come into your spirits, and He will 'make your feet as hind's feet, to tread upon the high places.' He will be the path, and will show the path.

and will give His angels charge concerning thee, to bear thee up in their hands, and to carry thee at last thither, whither He desires to bring thee. 'Say not in thy heart, Who shall ascend up into the heavens? The word is nigh thee.' Trust thyself to that Son of Man who came down from heaven, and was in heaven when He came, and He will become the ladder, with its foot on the earth, by which even your feeble steps may rise to God.

THE HAPPY HOPE

'Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.'—TITUS ii. 13.

THERE are two appearances spoken of in this context—the appearance of 'the grace of God that bringeth salvation'; and parallel with that, though at the same time contrasted with it, as being in very important senses one in nature and principle, though diverse in purpose and diverse in manner, is what the Apostle here calls 'the glorious appearing of the great God.'

The antithesis of contrast and of parallel is still more striking in the original than in our version, where our translators have adopted a method of rendering of which they are very fond, and which very often obscures the full meaning of the text. Paul wrote, 'Looking for that blessed [or 'happy'] hope, even the appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour,' where you see he contrasts, even more sharply than our Bible makes him do, the past appearance of the grace, and the future appearance of the glory.

Then, further, 'this appearance of the glory,' however bright with the terrible beauty and flashing lustre of divine majesty it may be, seems to the Apostle to be infinitely desirable, and becomes to him a happy hope. The reality, when it comes, will be pure joy. The irradiation of its approach shines from afar on his brightening face, and lightens his heart with a hope which is a prophetic joy. And the attitude of the Christian soul towards it is to be that of glad expectation, watching the dawning east and ready to salute the sun.

And yet further, this attitude of happy expectation of the glory is one chief object to be attained by the grace that has appeared. It came 'teaching,' or rather (as the word more accurately means) 'disciplining, that we should live looking for that happy hope.'

So, then, we have here for our consideration three points embodied in these words—The grace of God has appeared, the glory of God is to appear; the appearance of the glory is a blessed hope; the disciplining of the grace prepares us for the expectation of the glory.

I. First, then, take that thought—The appearance of the grace leads to the appearance of the glory.

The identity of the form of expression in the two clauses is intended to suggest the *likeness* of and the *connection* between the two appearances. In both there is a visible manifestation of God, and the latter rests upon the former, and completes and crowns it.

But the *difference* between the two is as strongly marked as the analogy; and it is not difficult to grasp distinctly the difference which the Apostle intends. While both are manifestations of the divine character in exercise, the specific phase (so to speak) of that character which appears is in one case 'grace,' and in the other 'glory.' If one might venture on any illustration in regard to such a subject, it is as when the pure white light is sent through glass of different colours, and at one moment beams mild through refreshing green, and at the next flames in fiery red that warns of danger.

The two words which are pitted against each other here have each a very wide range of meaning. But, as employed in this place, their antithetical force is clear enough. 'Grace' is active love, exercised towards inferiors, and towards those who deserve something else. So the grace of God is the active energy of His love, which stoops from the throne to move among men, and departing from the strict ground of justice and retribution, deals with us not according to our sins, nor rewards us according to our iniquities!

And then the contrasted word 'glory' has not only a very wide meaning, but also a definite and specific force, which the very antithesis suggests. The 'glory of God,' I believe, in one very important sense, *is* His 'grace.' The highest glory of God is the exhibition of forgiving and long-suffering love. Nothing can be grander. Nothing can be more majestic. Nothing, in the very profoundest sense of the word, can be more truly divine — more lustrous with all the beams of manifest deity, than the gentle raying forth of His mercy and His goodness.

But then, while that is the profoundest thought of the glory of God, there is another truth to be taken in conjunction with it. The phrase has, in scripture, a well marked and distinct sense, which may be illustrated from the Old Testament, where it generally means not so much the total impression of majesty and power made upon men by the whole revealed divine character, but rather the visible light which shone between the cherubim and proclaimed the present God. Connected with this more limited sense is the wider one of that which the material light above the mercy-seat symbolised—and which we have no better words to describe than to call it the ineffable and inaccessible brightness of that awful Name.

The contrast between the two will be suggested by a passage to which I may refer. The ancient lawgiver said, 'I beseech thee show me thy *glory*.' The answer was 'I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee.' The eye of man is incapable of apprehending the uncreated divine lustrousness and splendour of light, but capable of receiving some dim and partial apprehensions of the goodness, not indeed in its fulness, but in its consequences. And that goodness, though it be the brightest of 'the glories that compose His Name,' is not the only possible, nor the only actual manifestation of the glory of God. The prayer was unfulfilled when offered; for to answer it, as is possible for earth, would have been to antedate the slow evolution of the counsels of God. But answered it will be, and that on this globe. 'Every eye shall see Him.'

The grace has appeared, when Divine Love is incarnate among us. The long-suffering gentleness we have seen. And in it we have seen, in a very real sense, the glory, for 'we beheld His *glory*, full of *grace*.' But beyond that lies ready to be revealed in the last time the glory, the lustrous light, the majestic splendour, the flaming fire of manifest Divinity.

Again, the two verses thus bracketed together, and brought into sharp contrast, also suggest how like, as well as how unlike, these manifestations are to be.

In both cases there is an appearance, in the strictest sense of the word, that is to say, a thing visible to men's senses. Can we see the grace of God? We can see the love in exercise, cannot we? How? 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?' The appearance of Christ was the making visible, in human form, of the love of God.

My brother, the appearance of the glory will be the same—the making visible in human form of the light of throned and sovereign Deity. The one was incarnation; the other will be incarnation. The one was patent to men's senses—so will the other be. The grace has appeared. The glory *is* to appear. 'Why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' An historical fact, a bodily visibility, a manifestation of the divine nature and character in human form upon earth, and living and moving amongst men! As 'Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many,' 'so unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.' The two are strictly parallel. As the grace was visible in action by a Man among men, so the glory will be. What we look for is an actual bodily manifestation in a human form, on the solid earth, of the glory of God.

And then I would notice how emphatically this idea of the glory being all sphered and embodied in the living person of Jesus Christ proclaims His divine nature. It is 'the appearance of the glory'—then mark the next words—'of the great God and our Saviour.'

I am not going to enter upon the question of the interpretation of these words, which by many very competent authorities have been taken as all referring to Jesus Christ, and as being a singular instance in scripture of the attribution to Him directly, and without any explanation or modification, of the name, 'the great God!' I do not think that either grammar or dogma require that interpretation here. But I think that, if we take the words to refer distinctly to the Father and to the Son, the inference as to Christ's true and proper divinity which comes from them, so understood, is no less strong than the other interpretation would make it. For, in that case, the same one and indissoluble glory is ascribed to God the Father and to Christ our Lord, and the same act is the appearance of both. The human possesses the divine glory in such reality and fulness as it would be insanity if it were not blasphemy, and blasphemy if it were not absurdity, to predicate of any single man. The words coincide with His own saying, 'The Son of Man shall come in *His glory and of the Father*,' and point us necessarily and inevitably to the wonderful thought that the glory of God is capable of being fully imparted to, possessed by, and revealed through Jesus Christ; that the glory of God is Christ's glory, and the glory of Christ is God's. In deep, mysterious, real, eternal union the Father and the Son, the light and the ray, the fountain and the source, pour themselves out in loving-kindness on the world, and shall flash themselves in splendour at the last, when the Son of Man 'shall be manifested in His own glory and of the Father!'

And then I must touch very briefly another remarkable and plain contrast indicated in our text between these two 'appearings.' They are not only unlike in the subject (so to speak) or substance of the manifestation, but also in the purpose. The grace comes, patient, gentle, sedulous, labouring for our training and discipline. The glory comes—there is no word of training there! What does the glory come for? The one rises upon a benighted world—lambent and lustrous and gentle, like the slow, silent, climbing of the silvery moon through the darkling sky. But the other blazes out with a leap upon a stormy heaven—'as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west,' writing its fierce message across all the black page of the sky in one instant, 'so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.' Like some patient mother, the 'grace of God' has moved amongst men, with entreaty, with loving rebuke, with loving chastisement. She has been counsellor and comforter. She has disciplined and fostered with more than maternal wisdom and love. 'Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' But the glory appears for another purpose and in another guise—'Who is this that cometh with dyed garments? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art Thou red in thine apparel? I have trodden the winepress alone—for the day of vengeance is in Mine heart, and the year of My redeemed is come.'

II. But we have now to look at the second thought which is involved in these words, and that is, the appearing of the glory is a blessed hope.

The hope is blessed; or as we have already remarked, the word 'happy' may perhaps be substituted with advantage. Because it will be full of blessedness when it is a reality, therefore it is full of joy, while it is but a hope.

The characteristics of that future manifestation of glory are not such that its coming is wholly and universally a joy. There is something terrible in the beauty, something menacing in the brightness. But it is worth noticing that, notwithstanding all that gathers about it of terror, all that gathers about it of awful splendour, all that is solemn and heartshaking in the thought of judgment and retribution for the past, the irreversible and irrevocable past, yet to Paul it was the very crown of all his expectations of, and the very shining summit of all his desires for, the future—that Christ should appear.

The primitive Church thought a great deal more about the coming of Jesus Christ than about death—thought a great deal more about His coming than about 'Heaven.' To them the future was not so much a time of rest for themselves as the manifestation of their Lord. To them the way of passing out of life was not so much seeing corruption as being caught up together in the air.

And how far the darkness, which our Lord declared to be the divine counsel in regard to that future coming, enwrapped even those who, upon all other points, received the divine inspiration which made and makes them for evermore the infallible teachers and authorities for the Christian Church, is a moot question. If it were certain that the Apostle expected Christ's coming during his own lifetime, I do not know that we need be troubled at that as if it shook their authority, seeing that almost the last words which Christ spoke to His Apostles were a distinct declaration that He had not to reveal to them, and they were not to know 'the times and the seasons which the Father has put in His own power,' and seeing that the office of that Holy Spirit, as whose organs Paul and the other writers of the New Testament are our authoritative teachers, is expressly declared to be the bringing all things to their remembrance, whatsoever Christ had revealed. If, then, He expressly excepts from the compass of His revelation this point, it can be no derogation from the completeness of an inspired writer's authority, if he knows it not.

And if one takes into account the whole of Paul's words on the subject, they seem to express rather the same double anticipation, which we too have to cherish, desiring and looking, on the one hand, for the Saviour from heaven; desiring on the other hand to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. The numerous places in which Paul speaks of his own decease, sometimes as longed for, sometimes as certain, and, latterly, as near, are inconsistent with the theory that he looked for Christ's coming as certain in his own lifetime. So, too, are other anticipations which he expresses as to the future course of the Church, and progress of the Gospel in the world. He, like us, would appear to have had before his expectations the alternative. He knew not when the glory might burst upon the world, therefore he was ever standing as one that waits for his Lord. He knew not when he might have to die, therefore he laboured that, 'whether present or absent, he might be pleasing to Him.'

But that is not the point upon which I want to say a word. Dear brethren, the hope is a *happy* one. If we know 'the grace,' we shall not be afraid of 'the glory.' If the grace has disciplined in any measure, we may be sure that we shall partake in its perfection They that have seen the face of Christ looking down, as it were, upon them from the midst of the great darkness of the cross, and beneath the crown of thorns, need not be afraid to see the same face looking down upon them from amidst the blaze of the light, and from beneath the many crowns of the kingdoms of the world and the royalties of the heavens. Whosoever hath learnt to love and believe in the manifestation of the grace, he, and he only, can believe and hope for the manifestation of the glory.

And, Christian men and women, whilst thus the one ground upon which that assurance, 'The Lord cometh,' can be anything to us except a dread, if it is a belief at all, is the simple reliance upon his past work—let me urge the further consideration upon you and myself, how shamefully all of us neglect and overlook that blessed expectation! *We* live by hope. God, indeed, is above all hope. To that infinite eye, before which all things that were, and are, and are to come, lie open and manifest, or, rather, are insphered in His own person and self; to Him, who is the living past, the abiding present, the present future, there is no expectation. The animal creation is below hope. But for us that live on the central level—half-way between a beast and God, if I may so say—for us our lives are tossed about between memory and expectation.

We all of us possess, and most of us prostitute that wonderful gift—of shaping out some conception of the future. And what do we do with it? It might knit us to God, bear us up amid the glories of the abysses of the skies. We use it for making to ourselves pictures of fools' paradises of present pleasures or of successful earthly joys. The folly of men is not that they live by hope, but that they set their hopes on such things.

'They build too low
Who build beneath the stars!'

As for every other part of human nature, so for this strange faculty of our being, the gospel points to its true object, and the gospel gives its only consecration.

Dear brethren, is it true of us that into our hearts there steals subtle, impalpable, but quickening as the land breeze laden with the fragrance of flowers to the sailor tossing on the barren sea, a hidden but yet mighty hope of an inheritance with Him—when He shall appear? With eye lifted above and fixed upon the heavens do I look beyond the clouds to the stars? Alas! alas! the world drives that hope out of our hearts. It is with us as with the people in some rude country fair and scene of riot, where the booths and the shows and the drinking-places are pitched upon the edge of the common, and one step from the braying of the trumpets brings you into the solemn stillness of the night; and high above the stinking flare of the oil lamps there is the pure light of the stars in the sky, and not one amongst the many clowns that are stumbling about in the midst of sensual dissipation ever looks up to see that calm home that is arched above them!

We live for the present, do not we? And there, if only we would lift our eyes, there, even now, is the sign of the Son of Man in the heavens. My friend, it is as much an element of a Christian's character, and a part of his plain, imperative duty, to look for His appearing as it is to live 'soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world!'

III. Well then, finally, one word about the last consideration here, viz., The grace disciplines us to hope for the glory.

The very idea of discipline involves the notion that it is a preparatory stage, a transient process for a permanent result. It carries with it the idea of immaturity, of apprenticeship, so to speak. If it is discipline, it is discipline for some condition which is not yet reached. And so if the grace of God comes 'disciplining,' then there must be something beyond the epoch and era within which the discipline is confined.

And that just runs out into two considerations, upon which I have not time to dwell. Take the characteristics of the grace—clearly enough, it is preparing men for something beyond itself. Yield to the discipline and the hope will grow.

Take the characteristics of the grace. Here is a great system, based upon a stupendous and inconceivable act of divine sacrifice, involving a mysterious identification of the whole race of sinful men with the Saviour, embodying the most wonderful love of God, and being the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. Here is a life perfectly innocent, perfectly stainless, brought to the extremity of evil, and having never swerved one inch from the divine commandments, yet dying at last under a consciousness of separation and desertion from God! Here are a cross, a resurrection, an ascension, an omnipotent Spirit, an all-guiding Word, a whole series of powers and agencies brought to bear! Does any man believe that such a wealth of divine energy and resource would be put forth and employed for purposes that break short off when a man is put into his coffin, and that have nothing beyond this world for their field?

Here is a perfect instrument for making men perfect, and what does it do? It makes men so good and leaves them so bad that unless they are to be made still better and perfected, God's work on the soul is at once an unparalleled success and a confounding failure—a puzzle, in that having done so much it does not do more; in that having done so little it has done so much. The achievements of Christianity upon single souls, and its failures upon those for whom it has done most, when measured against, and compared with, its manifest adaptation to a loftier issue than it has ever reached here on earth, all coincide to say—the grace (because its purpose is discipline, and because its purpose is but partially achieved here on earth) *demands* a glory, when they whose darkness has been partially made 'light in the Lord,' by the discipline of grace, shall 'blaze forth as the sun' in the Heavenly Father's Kingdom of Glory.

Yield to the discipline, and the hope will be strengthened. You will never entertain in any vigour and operative power upon your lives the expectation of that coming of the glory unless you live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

That discipline submitted to is, if I may so say, like that great apparatus which you find by the side of an astronomer's biggest telescope, to wheel it upon its centre and to point its tube to the star on which he would look. So our anticipation and desire, the faculty of expectation which we have, is wont to be directed along the low level of earth, and it needs the pinions and levers of that gracious discipline, making us sober, righteous, godly, in order to heave it upwards, full-front against the sky, that the stars may shine into it.

The speculum, the object-glass, must be polished and cut by many a stroke and much friction ere it will reflect 'the image of the heavenly'; so grace disciplines us, patiently, slowly, by repeated strokes, by much rubbing, by much pain—disciplines us to live in self-restraint, in righteousness and godliness, and then the cleared eye beholds the heavens, and the purged heart grows towards 'the Coming' as its hope and its life.

Dear brethren, let us not fling away the treasures of our hearts' desires upon trifles and earth. Let us not set our hopes on that which is not, nor paint that misty wall that rings round our present with evanescent colours like the landscapes of a dream. We may have a hope which is a certainty, as sure as a history, as vivid as a present fact. Let us love and trust Him who has been manifested to save us from our sins, and in whom we behold all the grace and truth of God. If our eyes have learnt to behold and our hearts to love Him whom we have not seen, amid all the bewildering glares and false appearances of the present, our hopes will happily discern Him and be at rest, amid the splendours of that solemn hour when He shall come in His glory to render to every man according to His works.

With that hope the future, near or far, has no fears hidden in its depths. Without it, there is no real anchorage for our trembling hearts, and nothing to hold by when the storm comes. The alternative is before each of us, 'having *no* hope,' or 'looking for that blessed hope.' God help us all to believe that Christ *has* come for me! Then I shall be glad when I think that Christ will come again to receive me unto Himself!

CHRIST'S GIFT OF HIMSELF

'Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people.'—TITUS ii. 14.

WE have seen in former sermons on the preceding context that the Apostle has been setting forth the appearing of the grace of God as having for its great purpose the production of a holy and godly character and conduct. In these words which close the section he returns substantially to the same theme, only, as a great composer will do with some favourite musical movement, he repeats it in a somewhat different key and with variations. The variations are mainly two. Instead of the more general and less definite expression, 'the grace of God hath appeared,' he now specifies the precise act in which that grace did appear. 'He gave Himself for us.' Christ's self-sacrifice is the 'appearing of the grace of God.' The diffused flame is gathered into a focus, and thus concentrated it has appeared to melt hearts. Then there is a second variation in the treatment of the theme here, and that is that the actor is different. In the former case it was 'we' who, trained by 'the appearing of the grace,' were to deny ourselves and 'live soberly, righteously, and godly.' Here it is 'He' who redeems and purifies us by His gift of Himself. He and we, the human and the divine, co-operate. If we 'deny ourselves,' and 'live soberly, righteously, and godly,' it is because He 'has redeemed us.' If He has purified us, it is in the measure in which we deny ourselves and yield ourselves to His influences. And so the two views stereoscope and become a solid reality.

Now then, there are three points to which I would turn especially in the words before us—Christ's great self-bestowment, Christ's great emancipation, Christ's great acquisition. 'He gave Himself,' the great self-bestowment; 'that He might redeem us,' the great emancipation; 'and purify unto Himself a people for a possession,' the great acquisition.

I. First, then, the great self-bestowment.

'He gave Himself,' the supreme token of love every where, the natural expression of love everywhere We know inferior instances of the same sort, and they make the very salt of life. The most self-engrossed recognises their nobility, and the most cold-blooded thrills at the sight. We know what it is for benefactors, and well-wishers, and enthusiasts of all sorts to yield up themselves joyfully for some great cause not their own, or for some persons who appeal to their hearts. The one noble thing in the devilish trade of war is that there sometimes we can see men flinging their lives away gladly in the thrill of devotion to the cause for which they fight. In the narrower regions of our hearts and homes, happy husbands and wives, mothers to their children, know what it is joyfully to give themselves away. All these illustrations do help us, but they help us only a very little bit along the road to understand that supreme and transcendent gift of a self of which Paul is speaking here as the basis of all nobleness in the characters of men. After we have travelled as far as any human illustration or analogy will help us, we are still infinitely far from that great fact. They lead us along the road, but it is not only a question of travelling along a road, it is a question of springing from the furthest point attained up into the very heaven itself, for this gift is unique, and to be paralleled by naught beside.

It began earlier, the initial step was when 'the Word became flesh.' There was one Man who willed to be Man, and whose not being 'ashamed to call us brethren,' and taking upon Himself part of the children's flesh and blood, was the supreme instance of condescending self-abandonment and bestowment. It began earlier; it went deeper; for not only is His self-surrender unstained by the smallest self-regard, as is manifest by the records of His life, but it goes down deep and deep and deep into such an utter gift of

Himself as no mere human beneficence can ever emulate or even approximate to. And it brought with it heavier burdens and deeper sorrows, which culminated in that great act which, by its very greatness, has sometimes led men to separate it from the life of which it was the climax and superlative degree, and to declare that only in His death does the Lord give Himself for the life of the world, whereas the life among men, with all its pains of contact, with all its pains of sympathy, with all its self-oblivion, was as really a part of Christ's giving Himself to the world as was even that death upon the Cross, by which the gift was perfected and sealed. So then, brethren, whilst we thankfully accept the analogies which lead us a little way, let us never forget that in this matter degree is not the only difference, and quality as well as quantity are unlike.

But mark the other word. 'He gave Himself for us.' Now the Apostle here uses a word which does not imply 'instead of,' but 'for our behoof.' He is not for the moment dwelling upon the way in which that gift benefits—that comes in the next clause—but simply upon the fact that it does benefit. And Christ gave Himself—in a way to be subsequently declared—for the advantage of whoever may be included in the 'us.' And who are the 'us'? Paul was talking to Titus, and was including with him these Cretan Christians, none of whom had ever been seen by or seen Jesus. So that 'us' is universal, and includes all humanity. But it does more than that. Jesus Christ's giving of Himself to us was no indefinite gift of a general beneficence, which had no knowledge of, or feeling towards, the individual units that make up the company, but as I venture to believe, and as I would press upon you to consider whether our Christian conception of Jesus

Christ as the Incarnate Word does not necessarily carry with it, the human heart of Christ loved each unit of the mass, that the divine eye separated and distinguished We cannot 'see the wood for the trees.' We generalise our beneficence, and we lose sight of the individuals that are to be benefited by it. Who of us can specify the single souls or bodies that may be helped by our contributions to a fund for dealing with some general disaster? But Jesus Christ takes men one by one, and 'He gave Himself for us' because 'He gave Himself for me,' and thee, and thee, and all the single souls that make up mankind. Each was in His loving desire a recipient of the gift.

Brethren, I venture to assert, though it is impossible for me to go on here at any length to establish the assertion, that this conception of a Christ who not merely spoke, and was gentle and gracious, and the type of excellence, and the realised ideal of human perfection, but who came to do and to give Himself for the behoof of every soul of man, is the heart of Christianity. This is the view which, like a key, will unlock the rusty gates of our wills and spirits. This is the conception which alone adequately represents the teaching of scripture, the requirements of the deepest reason, and what is even more authoritative, the instinctive needs of hungry, sin-laden hearts. Here is the lever that moves the world: 'He gave Himself for us.'

II. Now, secondly, notice Christ's great emancipation.

The Apostle states the object of the gift in a twofold fashion, 'That He might redeem us all from iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.' Let me deal now with the former of these two expressions. The object of Christ's gift is man's redemption. And what is redemption? Well, it is no doubt a metaphorical expression, and there lies beneath it the image of a slave set free by a ransom. That is in the word, and no fair interpretation of the word can strike that out of the depth of its meaning. So then we begin as the fundamental fact, without which we shall never come either to understand the meaning of Christ's whole appearance, or get the highest good out of it for our own souls, with this conception of our condition—that we are in bondage to what the Apostle here calls 'iniquity,' or lawlessness.

Now do not say that this is Pauline, and that the Christ of the gospels does not say so. He does. Do you remember what He said when the people, with that strange but yet universal forgetfulness or ignoring of the facts of their condition, said to Him, whilst the Roman garrison in the castle might have heard the boast: 'We were never in bondage to any man'? He answered: 'He that doeth sin is the slave of sin.' You may like it or not like it; you may believe that it is the deepest view of human nature; or you may brush it aside as being narrow and pessimistic and old-fashioned, and all the rest of it, but it is Christ's view. Do not say it is Paul's. It *is* Paul's; but he got it from Jesus, and you have Him to reckon with, and Him to contradict, if *you* do not. And, alas! a great many of us do not recognise that, after all is said and done, the fact of sin, considered as setting up myself as my own centre and law, in antagonism to, or in neglect of, God, who ought to be my centre, is the universal experience of humanity. The fetters are on our limbs. I remember a story of an English author in the early part of last century, who was put into prison for some imaginary offence, and who pleased himself in a peurile fashion by twisting flowers round the grating of his window, and making believe that he was a free man. Yes, that is what a great many of us do. We try to hide the fetters by putting silk handkerchiefs over them. We, too, like these presumptuous Jews, say: 'We were never in bondage to any man.' No, not in bondage to any *man*, but in bondage worse than that. What about those tendencies in yourself—these lusts and passions, these temptations to ignoring God and living for self, and to other sins that, like springing tigers, have fixed their talons in us and keep us down, in spite of our kicking and struggling? The root cause of almost all the inadequate conceptions of Christ and His work which depart from the plain teaching of Christ and Scripture, lies here, that men do not recognise the fact of their bondage to sin. Wherever that recognition is weak, you will have a maimed Christ and an impotent Christ. It is of small profit to argue about theological doctrines unless you can get a man to feel that he is a sinful man in God's sight. And when he has learnt what sin means, what guilt means, what the tyranny of a committed transgression means, what the awful voice of a roused conscience means, he will be ready to fling aside all his superficial, easy-going thoughts about Jesus of Nazareth, and to clutch as his one hope the great word: 'Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.' 'He gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us.'

And so we come to the conception that that giving Himself for us is more than a giving of Himself on behalf of us, in some vague way, and that *the* way in which Jesus Christ gives Himself for us is that He gives Himself instead of us.

And there, as I humbly venture to believe, is the point of view at which we must stand, if we would give due weight either to His words or to His Cross. There is the point of view at which, as I humbly venture to believe, we must stand if we would receive into our hearts the greatest blessing that that Lord can give—emancipation from sin's guilt by that great Sacrifice of His, emancipation from sin's power by the presence within us of His own life and spirit. Christ came into the world 'to give His life a ransom for many.' Again I say, therefore, do not pooh-pooh such teaching as this of my text, or may I venture to say—I do it with all humility—such teaching as I am trying to give now, with the easy and superficial remarks that it is Pauline. It is Christ's—'The Son of Man came to give His life a ransom for many.' Oh, dear friends, there is the power. Christianity *minus* that Sacrifice is not a Christianity that the world or the flesh or the devil have ever been, or ever need to have been, much afraid of. We may gather metaphors in crowds to illustrate that Sacrifice, but they all fail, for it is unique and transcendent. Men have given themselves up to fetters that others might be made free. Men have given themselves up to the death that others might live. There was a Swiss soldier in one fight who gathered the spears of the enemy into a sheaf, and pointed them to his own breast, that a path might be cleared for the advance of his comrades. The angel that came into Peter's cell touched him and the fetters fell from his limbs. Christ has come into the dark prison of our humanity, and a drop of His blood on the fetters that bind me to my sin, and my sin to me, corrodes them into dust, and my limbs are free. He fronts all our tyrants as He fronted the Roman soldiers, and says, 'I am He; if ye seek Me, let these go their way.' He 'gave Himself for us that He might redeem us.'

III. And now your time will not allow me to speak, except very inadequately, about the last point that is here, and that is Christ's great acquisition.

'That He might purify unto Himself a people for a possession'—as is the proper rendering—'zealous of good works.' The Apostle is quoting, as I suppose we all know, from the ancient words which make the charter of the Israelitish nation, in which God declared that they were to Him a 'people of a possession above all the nations that are on the earth,' and he transfers these great words to Christ, and our relation to Him. He, too, has won a people for His very own. Christ wins us for His because He has given Himself to be ours. Mark how beautifully the reciprocalness of the relation is suggested by the former clause of our text, 'He gave Himself for us,' that He might win us for Himself 'for a possession.' Yes, in the commerce of love, nothing but a heart can buy a heart, nothing but a heart can pay for a heart. Jesus gives Himself to me, that I may give myself to Him. That is the only gift that satisfies Him. The only result which He recognises as being the fruit of the travail of His soul, which is sufficient for Him, is that we poor men, delivered from our selfishness, emancipated from our sins, with our wills set free, should go to Him and say, 'Lord, Thou art mine, and I, poor as I am, little as the gift is, I am Thine.'

We shall only be His in the measure in which we are 'purified.' And it is His love that purifies us, and His gift that purifies. For that gift sets in operation within us a multitude of new motives and new desires. And, more than that, He gave Himself that our sins might be taken away. But there is the present gift, as well as the past one, for He is giving Himself still, moment by moment, and hour by hour, to every one that cleaves to Him. And that gift of Himself comes into our hearts as, according to Luther's old metaphor, the Elbe was turned into the stable to sweep out all the filth, and make all things clean.

So, dear friends, let us cleave to that Lord. Let us see to it that we have fathomed, and not only fathomed, but accepted, the great gift of Himself in its most transcendent form, in its mightiest efficacy, the gift by which, by His death, He has taken away the guilt, and by His life within us, breaks the power of our sins, and makes us eager zealots, enthusiasts for all manner of 'good works.'

ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS

'. . . Zealous of good works.'—TITUS ii. 14.

WE have seen in previous sermons on the preceding context how emphatically the Apostle reiterates that the end of the gospel is the production of Christlike and Christ-pleasing character. For this purpose our Lord came, and in Him the grace of God broke through the clouds which wrapped men in dark folds of ignorance and sin. For this end Christ died, giving Himself for us, that 'He might redeem us from iniquity and purify unto Himself a people for a possession.' That insistence on practice as the upshot of doctrine is characteristic of the three last letters of the Apostle, which are called the Pastoral Epistles, and it is very natural in an old man. Just as tradition tells us that when John was too feeble to walk, and too old to say much, he was carried Sunday by Sunday into the assembly of the Church to say nothing more than 'Little children, love one another,' so Paul, having laid the foundations in the great doctrinal Epistles of his early time, now an old man, deals rather with practice than with doctrine. But the practice is, in his mind, the offshoot of, and inseparably connected with, the doctrine, and to pit the one against the other, as some people do nowadays, is to say, 'I do not care much about root; fruit is what I want'; or, 'I make little account of what a man eats; what I look to is his muscle and his strength.' But will there be any fruit without a root, or any muscle and strength that is not nourished? Paul's gospel is ethical because it *is* a gospel.

Now these words of my text are a kind of appendix to what precedes them, in which the Apostle has been sketching the sort of people that Christ's mission and work are intended to make. He says they are to be redeemed, they are to be purified, they are to be won for Christ's own, and to be conscious that they are His; and then he adds this remarkable expression which I have not been able to deal with at length in former sermons, but which is too important to pass by—'zealous'—what for?—'good works.'

Now I think, if we will consider these words, we shall find that they convey some lessons, always important, and, as it seems to me, extremely important for the Church of this generation.

I. A consistent Christian will be a zealous Christian.

I do not need to waste your time in trying to define what zeal is. We all know it. When we approve of its object we admire it and call it 'beautiful consecration'; when we are not in sympathy with its objects we call it 'ridiculous exaggeration' and 'fanaticism.' Its elements are threefold, an overmastering recognition of the greatness of some truth, or cause, or person, for which, or for whom, we are 'zealous'—a glow of emotion arising from that recognition, and a consciousness of obligation to strain all our powers for the diffusion of the truth, or the advancement of the cause, or the honour of the person, for whom we are zealous. Now, of course, when a man gets hold of some truth that masters him, there is always the danger of his losing the sense of proportion, of his getting his perspective wrong, and being so swallowed up in the one thing that he sees, that, like a horse with blinkers, he does not see anything except that one narrow line that lies in front of him. And so zeal is always in danger of being deformed into fanaticism, but it is God's way in working the world onwards, to raise up successions of men, each of whom recognises with overwhelming clearness some one little segment of the great orb of truth, and the world advances because there are men that believe in one thing, that see one thing, and that give themselves, body and soul, to the setting forth of that one thing. All the rest of us stand by and say, 'What ridiculous exaggeration! how entirely oblivious he is counter-balancing considerations; how he has narrowed himself down into being the instrument and the apostle of this one thing!' Yes; and if you want to bore a hole through a six-inch plank, you have to put a pretty sharp point upon your tool, and to make it very 'narrow.' The world never gets to see any truth, until it has been hammered into it by some man who did not see any other truth.

There will come, too, with that overwhelming conception of the greatness of the truth, or of the person, or of the cause, a glow of emotion. Argument may be worked in fire or in frost, and the arguments that melt are warm, or if I might go back to my former figure, your boring tool will penetrate more quickly and easily if it has been heated as well as pointed. And zeal glows, and it is the glow rather than reasoning that convinces men.

I need not dwell upon other characteristics of zeal, but my next thought is—Christianity is such as that, if a man really and fully accepts it, he cannot help being zealous. Look at the truths that we say we believe. We believe in ideas about the significance and issues of this earthly life, so solemn, so great, so transcending all present experience, that it is incredible that they can enter into a man's mind in any deep sense, and leave him cold and indifferent. We believe in such truths about Sin and Judgment and Eternity that they might kindle a soul beneath the ribs of death, and burn up all indifference, so as that the extremist, enthusiastic grasp of them is only moderation and rational. We say that we believe that the infinite, divine nature was incarnated in a Man, and that that Man lived and died because He loved every soul, and that that death brings to the world emancipation, and that Life brings to the world life, and that these things are true for all men. What I maintain is, that if a man really believes these things, not with the mere conventional faith that characterises multitudes of professing Christians, it is impossible that he should be left cold. If the sun is shining the temperature will go up; and if the thermometer does not rise it is because something or other has come between the sunbeam and the mercury. If the iceberg floats down into the warm oceans of the temperate or tropical zones it will melt into sweet water, and it cannot remain ice. If it continue grim and cold, it is because there is only the sun of the Arctic winter, which has a pale light, and scarcely any warmth at all, shining down upon it. An indifferent Christian, who believes in sin and in redemption and in an incarnate Christ and in a sacrifice on the Cross and in a Divine Spirit and in a future Judgment and remains cold, is all but an impossibility; he is a contradiction in terms, and a living monster.

Brethren, I venture to plead with you that there are few things which the conventional Christianity of this day needs more than to awake to the fact that the 'sober standard of feeling in matters of religion,' which some so much admire, is contrary to the genius of the gospel, and the importance of the truths which it contains. And when I say a sober standard I do not mean the sobriety which the New Testament enjoins, but I mean the sobriety which the conventional Christianity of this day so much admires, and which is scarcely distinguishable with a microscope from absolute indifference. We are frequently besought to beware of enthusiasm. I hear from quarters where one would not expect to hear it, the cynical politician's advice, 'Not too much zeal, I beg of you.' And I venture to oppose to all that what the voice of the Master from heaven said, 'I would thou were cold or hot.' This Christianity that never turns a hair, that does not know what zeal means, seems to me uncommonly like no Christianity at all.

We all want to be roused from our torpor. This community, like every church of professing Christians, is weighted by a mass of loosely attached and half-believing professing Christians who are nothing better than clogs on the wheel, and instruments for bringing down the temperature of the whole mass. And what we want, I believe more than anything else, is that we should be zealous, as dominated by the overwhelming greatness and solemnity of the truths, and melted into a passion of love by the overwhelming greatness and love of the Person whom the gospel reveals to us. We are to be 'zealous,' and whilst I dare not say that a true Christian will be a zealous one, I dare not conceal my conviction that a consistent Christian will be.

II. Now notice that such zeal finds its best field in our personal character.

'Zealous'—the word suggests, I suppose, pictures of men, devoted to a cause, and going out into the world to try and persuade other people to believe it, becoming the apostles and missionaries of some truth, or of some movement, or of some great principle, religious or social. But Paul suggests here another region in which zeal is to find exercise—'zealous for good works.'

Now do not let us interpret these last two words in the narrow, conventional sense which they have come to bear in the Church. It is a very significant and a very sad thing that this wide expression 'good works,' which in the Apostle's mind covered the whole ground of Christian morality, has been narrowed down to mean specific acts of beneficence, bits of charity, giving away blankets and soup, visiting the poor, and the like, which have got stamped on them, with just a *soupçon* of contempt in the expression, the name 'good works.' He means a great deal more than that. He means exactly the same thing which he has already twice described as being the end of the gospel, that we should 'live soberly, righteously, godly,' and again, that we should be redeemed from all iniquity, and purified. Within the four corners of this expression, 'good works,' lie 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' every virtue and every praise. That is the width of the object which the Apostle here proposes for Christian zeal.

Now the word which he here employs, and which is rightly translated 'zealous,' is literally 'a Zealot.' In Jewish history the Zealots were a class of men who, from the days of the Maccabees downwards, were fanatically devoted to the ritual and law of Judaism, and vehemently opposed any relaxation of or departure from it. But their religious zeal, as they thought it, did not keep them from the blackest crimes, and there were no more turbulent and no more immoral men in the dying agonies of the Jewish State than these zealots who had a zeal for God, but neither according to knowledge nor according to morality. One of the apostles, Simon Zelotes—the Zealot—had probably belonged to that class, and had found out a better Object for his zeal, when he turned to Jesus Christ and became an apostle. Paul uses the word in reference to himself when he speaks about himself as having been exceedingly 'zealous for the traditions of the fathers,' and it is used in Acts of the many Jewish Christians who are spoken of as being all 'zealous for the Law.' That is one type of zeal—a zeal that fastens on externals, that tries to enforce specific acts of conduct, that is devoted to ceremonial and regulations and red tape. And Paul points us here to another type, 'Zealous for good works.' Jehu, with His hands carmined with wholesale slaughter, turned to the son of Rechab and said, 'Come and see my zeal for the Lord.' Yes, a little bit for the Lord, and a great deal for Jehu. That is the sort of thing that goes about the world as zeal. A turbid river in spate picks up and carries along a great many foul elements; and zeal is always in danger of becoming passionate indignation against a man who will not believe what I want him to believe, not so much because it is true as because I think it is. A great many very impure elements mix themselves up with our zeal, when it is directed to amending the world. If we set to amend ourselves, and direct our zeal in that direction, we shall find 'ample scope and verge enough' for its operations.

And, brethren, what different lives we should live if instead of feeling bound to the exercise of virtues and graces which do not come sweet and easy to us, and instead of feeling that we ought to do so and so, and that we do not one bit wish to do it, we had this over-mastering enthusiasm for holiness and passion for perfection which is involved in the words before us. To be 'zealous of good works' is to be eagerly desirous of being beautiful and pure and true and noble and Christlike, to be panting after perfection, and casting ourselves with all the energy of our nature into the work of growing like Christ. That is what Paul wants us all to be. Let us ask ourselves, is it the least like what I am? Does my Christian zeal go all out in the work of amending other people, or do I begin with amending myself?

III. And now my last word is, that this passion for perfection will come to us just in the measure in which we let the gospel lie upon our hearts and minds and influence us.

The truths will produce it, but not unless they are wrought into our minds and hearts. Christ, whom the truths reveal, will produce it, but not unless we keep ourselves by honest effort of mind and heart and will in close contact with Him. The upshot of all that I have been trying to say is this, that the one thing which the superficial half-and-half Christianity of this day needs is that it should come into closer contact with the truths of the gospel. I plead for no blind, unintelligent zeal, I plead for no worked-up, artificial fervour. I want no engine without a driver, I want no zeal that, like Phaeton, will upset the car and set everything on fire. I want that Christian men should believe what they believe, and that they should meditate on the truths of the gospel intelligently, systematically, as a whole, and that they should be in touch with Him whom the truths reveal. A *ruminant* belief that chews the cud of the truths it professes is what today's Christianity sorely wants. And if we in such a fashion keep ourselves under the spell of these truths, then the zeal will come; not else. The spurious zeal which is excited by other stimulants will do more harm than good, and will be not like the river that flows, bringing fertility and freshness, but like the furious torrents of the spring when the ice is melting and the snows running down, which sweep away the very soil where growth was possible, and leave behind only barren rock.

Fix in your hearts and minds, and God grant that they may influence your conduct, these two things—on the one hand, that your Christianity is very suspicious if it has no flow in it towards Jesus, and if it has no passion towards perfection; and, on the other hand, that the surest way to bring all beauties of a moral and spiritual sort into your character and out into your lives is to gaze believingly on the appearing of the grace which God has sent us for the very purpose, even of Him who gave Himself for us. When we are moved thereby to give ourselves to Him, we shall 'covet earnestly the best gifts,' and be 'zealous for,' and not merely reluctant and grudging doers of, 'good works.'

MAINTAINING GOOD WORKS

'. . . These things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.'—Titus iii. 8.

There is so much about 'good works' in the so-called Pastoral Epistles (the two to Timothy, and this to Titus), that some critics who think they have sharp eyes have concluded that Paul was not their author. But surely it is very natural that as a man gets older he shall get more practical, and it is equally natural that he should fight the enemies who are in front of him at the moment, and not thrice slay the slain. Obviously the churches whom he had in view in his letters to Timothy and Titus did not stand in need of the elaborate and far-reaching argumentation of the Epistle to the Romans, or of the great protest against Jewish ritualism in the Epistle to the Galatians, or of the profound teaching about the Church which is in the Epistle to the Ephesians. The foundation had been laid, and, like a sensible man, Paul proceeded to build upon it. So instead of the difference in tone between those more theological letters and this more practical one being a cause of suspicion as to the authorship of the latter, it seems to me to be an argument in favour of the identity of authorship. The variation in tone corresponds to what happens in the case of every thoughtful Christian teacher as he grows in years, and comes to feel more and more that all doctrine is for practice. Here, then, we have the Apostle's last will and testament, so to speak, left to all the churches, that 'they which believe in God might be careful to maintain good works.'

According to that, the hall-mark of a Christian is conduct—'good works.'

But we must beware of narrowing the meaning of that expression, as is too often done, so as to include in it mainly certain conventional forms of charity or beneficence, like 'slumming' or tract-distributing, or Sunday-school teaching, and the like. These and such as these are, no doubt, one form of good works, but by no means the whole, and their having all but monopolised the name is one reason why many Christian people fail to apprehend the full significance of New Testament teaching on the subject. These acts are but as a creek in a great sea. Paul tells us what he takes to be included in the designation, when he bids the Philippians think on 'whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure,' and having thought on them, do them.

I have omitted one word in that quotation, for Paul speaks also of 'whatsoever things are lovely.' Loveliness is an essential quality of the highest kind of good works. Many of us know that the Greeks, wise beyond many who have clearer light but duller eyes, used the same word to express goodness and beauty. The Apostle uses that pregnant word in our text, and we should well ponder the teaching given by that word. For it tells Christians that they are to take heed to make their goodness lovely, not to 'graft grace on a crab-stock,' nor to present a frowning goodness to the world. It is not enough that they who believe in God should be careful to exhibit conduct which commends itself to every man's conscience as right and pure. They should also commend themselves as being fair with a more than earthly beauty, and lustrous with a more than earthly radiance. There are many Christian people who spoil the effect of high-principled, self-sacrificing conduct by forgetting that beautifulness is an essential part of the highest goodness. Sour grapes are not the grapes that are intended to be grown on the true vine.

But now, will you notice, as a further light upon Paul's notion of how to go about growing these grapes, what goes before? 'These things. I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which believe in God might be careful to maintain good works.' What are 'these things'? They are a brief summary of what we call 'the Gospel'; the evangelical teaching that 'the kindness and love of God our Saviour' had 'appeared,' and that 'He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost . . . that . . . we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.' In effect Paul says to Timothy: 'Now keep on insisting upon that.' The word translated 'affirm constantly' is a very strong one. It means a forcible and continually repeated enunciation, and the plain English of Paul's injunction to Timothy is: Keep on preaching the gospel as the surest way to produce disciples full of good works. People say to us: 'Come down to daily life and conduct; never mind your dogmas.' If you leave out what these critics mean by dogma, and try to make daily life beautiful without it, you may as well hold your tongue. And the men who forget to 'affirm' these things 'constantly,' and preach morals without gospel, are like builders who begin to build on the second story, whose baseless castles in the air are sure to come down in ruins. The true way to produce moral conduct is to bring into clear prominence evangelical truth.

But notice again, it is 'those which believe in God who will be careful to maintain good works.' That is to say, faith is the productive cause of good works, and good works are, as I said, 'the hall-mark of faith.' If a man believes, then he will do 'good works.' The converse must also be true. If a man does not do good works, what, then, about his belief? 'Show me thy faith without thy works'—that is an impossible demand. The only way to show faith is by our works, and so all attempts to rend them apart, either in theory or in practice, are as absurd as it would be to take a piece of cloth, and try to tear away the inside from the outside. 'Faith' is the underside, 'good works' is the upper, and the web is one. Faith is the principle of works; works are the manifestation and making visible of faith.

So now turn for a moment to another point. The Apostle's command here implies a principle, that Christian work should always, and will always, if the faith is genuine, be in advance of all other sorts of good work. That is implied in one of the words used here which means literally 'be foremost, stand in the front,' and I see no reason why the literal meaning should not be retained here. If it is retained, we have the thought implied—if you are a Christian man you should be ahead of the world in your goodness. You should lead, and not follow, or keep step with those who are not Christians. The Church's morality on the wide scale and individual practice on the narrow, ought to be, and will be, if we are true to the gospel, far in advance of the ordinary opinion and practice of the day in which we live. If we are Christians, we are meant to be leaders, and that means that we shall often, like other leaders, have to endure a great deal of obloquy and calumny from the people whom we are trying to lead, and who are loitering behind us. The Christian Church, as the Apostle James says, is meant to be a 'kind of first fruits of God's creatures,' ripe before the others, riper than the others always. Does the Christian Church lead the conscience of England to-day? Does it even try to do it? Does it recognise that its function is not to re-echo the morality of the street or of the newspaper, but to peal out the morality of Jesus Christ? Is it enough that Christian people should be *as* good, *as* charitable, *as* beneficent, *as* much interested in social questions as others, or should have the better, the purer, and the happier lives of the community for their great aim, *as* much as other people have them? Would it be enough to say 'the electric light is about as bright as a tallow candle?' Is it enough to say, 'Christian people keep abreast of the world's morality?' Let them go in advance, and if they go very far ahead sometimes, none the worse; the laggards will perhaps come up. But at all events, whether they do or not, 'I will that these things thou affirm constantly, in order that they which believe in God may take the lead in good works.'

And now there is a last point to be noted, and that is the Apostle's warning that, although thus the belief of the gospel, and the faith which springs from the belief, are the spring of good work, yet these will not become ours unless we are careful to stand in front.

What does that carefulness mean? The word implies two things, and the first of them may be put in the shape of an exhortation—bring your brains to bear on these truths that are being thus 'constantly affirmed.' Bring them into your hearts through your minds, that they may filter into and shape the life. I believe that one main reason why the morality of the Christian Church is not much further in advance of the morality of the world than it is, is because the individual members of the Church do not bring their minds into contact with the great truths of the gospel in such a fashion as they should. Christian practice is thin and poor and inconsistent, because Christian meditation on the gospel and on the Lord of the gospel, is shallow and infrequent. The truths that are to be 'affirmed' are the fuel that feeds the fire, and if there are no coals put on, the fire will very soon die down. And so there must be 'carefulness,' which means the occupation of the mind with the truths that produce holiness of life.

And there must be another thing, there must be a definite and direct and continuous effort to increase our faith. I have been saying that faith is the underside of all noble conduct; and in the measure in which it is strengthened, in that measure accurately will our 'good works' increase. Suppose Manchester had had two pipes from Thirlmere instead of one, during recent droughts, should we have been in such straits for water? There was plenty in the lake, but we could not get it into our houses because we had not piping enough. There is plenty of power in our gospel and in our God to make us rich in 'good works.' What is lacking is that we have not that connection, which is made by faith, through which the fulness of God will flow into our lives. If they want to grow crops in Eastern lands they have little to do but to sow the seed and to irrigate. Christ has sown the seed in His gospel. We have to look after the irrigation, and the crops will come of themselves. So our main effort should be to keep ourselves in touch with that great Lord, and to increase the faith by which we make all His power our very own.

PHILEMON

OWING OURSELVES TO CHRIST

'I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto Me even thine own self besides.'—PHIL. 19.

THE incomparable delicacy of this letter of Paul's has often been the theme of eulogium. I do not know that anywhere else in literature one can find such a gem, so admirably adapted for the purpose in hand. But beyond the wonderful tenderness and ingenuity born of right feeling and inbred courtesy which mark the letter, there is another point of view from which I have been in the habit of looking at it, as if it were a kind of parable of the way in which our Master pleads with us to do the things that He desires. The motive and principles of practical Christianity are all reducible to one—imitation of Jesus Christ. And therefore it is not fanciful if here we see, shining through the demeanour and conduct of the Apostle, some hint of the manner of the Master.

I venture to take these words as spoken to each Christian soul by a higher and greater voice than Paul's. 'I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto Me even thine own self besides.'

I. The first thing upon which I touch is our transcendent debt.

The Christian teacher may say to the soul which by his ministrations has been brought back to God and to peace in a very real sense: 'Thou owest thyself to me.

And the bond which knits any of us, dear brethren, of whom that is true to one another, is one the tenderness of which cannot be overestimated. I hope I am speaking to some hearts to whom my words come with a power greater than their intrinsic force deserves, because this sacredest of all human ties has, by God's mercy, been established between us.

But I pass from that altogether to the consideration of the loftier thought that is here. It is a literal fact that all of you Christian people, if you are Christians in any real sense, do owe your whole selves to Jesus Christ. Does a child owe itself to its parent? And has not Jesus Christ, if you are His, breathed into you by supernatural and real communication a better life and a better self, so that you have to say: 'I live, yet not I, but Jesus Christ liveth in me.' And if that be so, is not your spiritual being, your Christian self, purely and distinctly a gift from Him?

Does a man who is lying wrestling with mortal disease, and who is raised up by the skill and tenderness of his physician, owe his life to the doctor? Does a man who is drowning, and is dragged out of the river by some strong hand, owe himself to his rescuer? And is it not true that you and I were struggling with a disease which in its present form was mortal, and would very quickly end in death? Is it not true that all souls separated from God, howsoever they may seem to be living, are dead: and have not you been dragged from that living death by this dear Lord, so that, if you have not perished, you owe yourselves to Him?

Does a madman, who has been restored to self-control and sanity, owe himself to the sedulous care of him that has healed him? And is it not true, paradoxical as it sounds, that the more a man lives to himself the less he possesses himself; and that you have been delivered, if you are Christian men and women, from the tyranny of lust and passions, and from the abject servitude to the lower parts of your nature, and to all the shabby tyrants, in time and circumstance, that rob you of yourself; and have been set free and made sane and sober, and your own masters and your own owners, by Jesus Christ? To live to self is to lose self, and when we come to ourselves we depart from ourselves; and He who has enabled us to rule our own mutinous and anarchic nature, and to put will above passions and tastes and flesh, and conscience above will, and Christ above conscience has given us the gift which we never had before, of an assured possession of our own selves.

So, in simplest verity, as the Deliverer from the death that slays us, as the Restorer to us of the power of self-control and ownership, and as the Granter to us of a new and better life, which becomes the very self of our selves, and the heart of our being, Jesus Christ has given to us this great gift, and can look each of us in the face and say: 'I made thee.' The Eternal Word is Creator. 'I redeemed thee; I dwell in thee; I am thy better self, and thou owest to Me thine own self besides.'

II. Now for a word, in the next place, as to the all-comprehending obligation which is based upon this debt.

If it be true that by the sacrifice of Himself Christ has given us ourselves, what then? Why, then, dear brethren, the only adequate response to that gift, made ours at such cost to the Giver, is to give ourselves back wholly to Him who gave Himself wholly to us. Christ can only buy me at the cost of Himself. Christ only wants myself when He gives Himself. In the sweet commerce of that reciprocal love which is the foundation of all blessedness, the only equivalent for a heart is a heart. As in our daily life, and in our sweet human affections, husband and wife, and parent and children, have nothing that they can barter the one with the other except mutual interchange of self; so Jesus Christ's great gift to me can only be acknowledged, adequately responded to, when I give myself to Him.

> 'I give Thee all, I can no more,
> Poor though the offering be,'

must be the only language that can satisfy that infinite hunger of the divine human heart over us which prompted the death upon Calvary and made it, in His eyes who paid it, the only price to pay for the recompense of our love.

O brethren, surely when those majestic lips bend themselves into the utterance, 'Thou owest Me thine own self besides,' surely, surely, the answer that will spring to all our lips is: 'We live not to ourselves, but to Thee.'

And if I might for a moment dwell upon the definite particulars into which such an answer will expand itself, I might say that this entire surrender of self will be manifested by the occupation of all our nature with Jesus Christ. He is meant to be the food of my mind as truth; He is meant to be the food of my heart as love; He is meant to be the Lord of my will as supreme Commander. Tastes, inclinations, faculties, hopes, memories, desires, aspirations, they are all meant as so many tendrils by which my many-fingered spirit can twine itself round Him, and draw from Him nourishment and peace. Not that He demands that we should cease to exercise these faculties of ours upon other objects which He Himself has provided, but that in all the lower reaches and ranges of our mental and spiritual occupations, in all our human loves and efforts and desires, there should blend the thought of Him. Just as a beam of light, if it struck down on us now, would disperse none of the motes which would be revealed dancing in its path, so the love of Christ and the occupation of our whole nature with Him, would give a glory to the lesser objects to which our other faculties and desires may turn. If we loved one another in Him we should find each other worthier of our love. If we pursued truth and study and knowledge in Him we should find the knowledge easier and more blessed. If all our hopes, desires, and efforts were illuminated by a reference to Himself, then they would all flash up into beauty and power.

And again, this entire self-surrender should manifest itself in an utter and absolute submission to, and conformity with, His will. The slave has no will but his master's. That is degradation and blasphemy when it is tried to be enforced or practised as between two men; but it is honour and dignity and blessedness when it is practised as to Christ. Submit! submit! Obey! obey! Let your wills be held in suspense until His is manifested; and when it is, then cheerfully take what He sends. If His hand comes blighting and blasting, bow! If His hand comes pointing and directing, follow! The surrender of self must be accomplished in the region of the will. And when I can say, 'Not my will, but Thine be done,' then, and in that measure, I can say, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.'

Again, this entire surrender will manifest itself in the devotion of our whole being to His name and glory. Words easily spoken! words which if they were truly transmuted into life by any of us would revolutionise our whole nature and conduct! To serve Him, to make Him the End for which we live; to try, as our highest purpose, to spread His sweet name, and to advance His Kingdom—theoretically that is what you Christian men and women say you are doing, by the profession that you make. Practically, I wonder how many of the people who owe themselves to Jesus Christ have never, in all their lives, done a thing for the simple purpose of honouring and glorifying His name.

And further, this entire surrender of self will manifest itself in regard not only to our being and our acting, but to our having. I do not want to dwell upon this point at any length, but let me remind you, dear friends, that a slave has no possessions of his own. And you and I, if we are our own owners are so only because we are Christ's slaves. Therefore we have nothing. In the old, bad days the slave's cottage, his little bits of chattels, the patch of garden ground with its vegetables, and the few coins that he might have saved by selling these, they all belonged to his master because he belonged to his master. And that is true about you and me, and our balance at our bankers' and our houses and our possessions of all sorts. We say we believe that; do we administer these possessions as if we did believe it? Oh, if there came into our hearts, and kept there, the gush of thankfulness which is the only reasonable answer to the great rush of sacrificing love which Christ has poured upon us, there would be no more difficulties about money in regard of Christian enterprise. Jesus is 'worthy to receive riches.' Let us see to it that, being His slaves we do not hide away what He has given us from the service of Him to whom it belongs.

And now, dear brethren, all that sacrifice of which I have been speaking, while it is the plainest practical Christianity, and the only kind of life that corresponds to the facts of our relation to Jesus Christ, is a terrible contrast and a sharp rebuke to the average type of Christian among us. I do not want, God knows, I do not want to scold. And I know that if such surrender as my text implies is painful to any man, it is not worth the making; but I beseech you, Christian people, as I would plead with mine own self, to take these simple, threadbare thoughts into your hearts and consciences until it shall become pain to you to keep back, and a joy to surrender, all that you have to the Lord to whom we owe ourselves.

III. Lastly, and one word, about the repayment.

Jesus Christ stops in no man's debt. There is an old story in one of the historical books of the Old Testament about people who, in the middle of a doubtful negotiation, were smitten by conscience, and drew back from it. But one of them, with commercial shrewdness, remembered that a portion of their capital was already invested, and he says, 'What shall we do for the thousand talents that we have given, and are now sacrificing at the bidding of conscience?' And the answer was: 'The Lord is able to give thee much more than these.' That is true of all sacrifices for Him. He has given us abundant wages beforehand. What we give is His before it was ours. It remains His when it is called ours. We but give Him back His own. There is really nothing to repay, yet He repays, in a hundred ways. He does so by giving us a keen joy in the act of surrender.

That is fifty thousand times greater than the joy of keeping—or rather the difference between the two is not a question so much of quantity as of quality. What I give to Him I have; like a stone dropped into a stream, if the sun be shining and the ripples glancing, it looks far bigger, and any colour upon it is far brighter there, than when it lay in my hand. So all that is given to Jesus Christ comes back upon a man transformed and glorified, and when we give ourselves to Him, weak and sinful, He renders us back saints to ourselves. The joy of surrender is the sweetest of all the joys that a man has. 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,' and Christ bestows ourselves upon ourselves that we may have some portion of that joy.

And with it come other gladnesses. There is not only the joy of surrender, and the enhanced possession of all which is surrendered, but there is the larger possession of Himself which comes always as the issue of a surrender of ourselves to Him. When we thus yield He comes into our souls. It is only our self-engrossment that keeps Him out of our hearts; and when our hearts bow, they open: and when we give ourselves to Him it is possible for Him, in larger measure to give Himself to us. If you want to be assured of your gospel, live by it. If you want to have more of certitude of possessing His promises, try the experiment of yielding to His love. If you want more of Christ, give yourselves more to Him.

And as for the future, I need say little about that. There is a future, the overwhelming magnitude of whose recompense of reward shall beggar our loftiest anticipations, and surprise us with its greatness as well as shame us with the consciousness which it awakens that our poor, stained service is far overpaid by it. Such reaping from such sowing will make the joy of the harvest a wonder and a rapture. Who hath first given to Jesus, and it shall be recompensed to him again?

And now I beseech you to listen to your Saviour appealing to you with the tender word: 'I have given to thee Myself; and therein I have given to thee thyself. Now what dost thou give to Me?'

HEBREWS

DRIFTING

'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.'—HEB. ii. 1.

'LET them slip'; that conveys a vivid picture of a man holding some treasure with limp fingers, and allowing it to drop from his nerveless grasp. But, striking as that picture is, the one which is really expressed by the original word is more striking still. The Revised Version correctly renders, instead of, 'we should let them slip,' 'we drift away from them'; and that is the real meaning. 'Drifting' is the thing to be afraid of. Just as some boat, not made fast to the bank, certainly glides down stream so quietly and with so little friction that her passengers do not know that they are moving until they come up on deck, and see new fields around them, so the 'things which we have heard,' and to which we ought to be moored or anchored, we shall drift, drift, drift away from, and, in nine cases out of ten, shall not feel that we are moving, till we are roused by hearing the noise of the whirlpools and the falls close ahead of us; and look round and see a strange country. 'Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest, haply, we should drift away from them.'

I. So my text suggests, first, our danger.

We are in danger of drifting unconsciously from the anchorage of our faith—namely, the great words which we have heard. The currents that are brought to bear upon us run as strong as do any that are marked on charts and are the terror of sailors, and they need as careful steering and as great engine-power to resist them. Let us try to think of one or two of them.

There is the current of years. Time changes us all; and there is many a professing Christian who all unconsciously has slid away from his early better self, and is not now as devout a man—or with his life as completely under the influence of Christ and His gospel as he was in the early days. He keeps up appearances, but they are deceptive, and years have carried him down the stream and away from his old self.

There is the current of familiarity with the truth. It is a sad illustration of the weakness of human nature that we all tend to think that the familiar is commonplace, and that it is almost impossible for us, without a very specific and continuous effort, to keep up as fresh and deep an interest in a truth that we have believed all our days as in one that comes to us with the attraction of novelty. It has been well said that the most certain truths too often lie 'in the dormitory of the soul, side by side with exploded errors.' We all know how silently and unconsciously we lose our hold of the things that we think to be most surely believed among us; and whilst we fancy that we are grasping them they are gone from us just because we had never doubted, and always 'believed' them. Conjurers will tell you that if you press a coin in a man's palm and shut the hand quickly, he does not know for a moment or two whether the coin remains there or not. There are many of us who have closed our hands on the precious gold coin of the gospel, and it has been filched away from us, and we do not know that it has been until we open our hand and see the empty palm. We drift away by time and by familiarity.

Then there is constantly acting upon us the current of the continual pressure of our daily cares and anxieties and duties and joys. All these in their minuteness and their multiplicity tend to weaken our possession of, and to carry us away from, the great central truths of the gospel. A snowflake is a very tiny thing, but when the air is full of them, minute as they are, their white multitudes will bring death and a grave to the creatures on which they fall. And so the thousand trifles of our daily lives are all acting upon us, whether we know it or not, to absorb interest and attention and effort, and to withdraw all three from 'the truths which we have heard.' You may remember the story of the man in the Old Testament who had a prisoner put into his hands, with an injunction to guard carefully against his escape; and how, as he naïvely says, 'As thy servant was busy here and there, lo! he was gone. I had so many other things to do, on this side and that, and in front and behind, that I could not always keep my eyes on him; and he slipped through my fingers, and showed a clean pair of heels, and that is all I know. I never knew that he had gone until I came to look for him in an interval of my business, and found his fetters were empty.'

Ah, dear friends, that is the history of the decline and fall of many a professing Christian's Christianity: 'Thy servant was busy here and there doing his day's work'—the legitimate things that we are bound to do, and which are not meant to be occasions for withdrawing our hold of the truths of the gospel, but for deepening it. We are busied about them, and that which was committed to our care slips away, and we never know it.

Yes, and it is not only 'secular' work that does that. It may be done by what is called Christian work too. I believe, for my part, that much as one rejoices in the continual calls for service and activity that are addressed to the Christian Church to-day, there is a distinct danger that there shall be so much work that there is no time for solitude, for contemplation, for reviewing and deepening our communion with Jesus Christ. And I sometimes feel as if I would like to say to all Sunday-school teachers, and visitors, and Christian Endeavourers, and all the host of 'Christian workers': 'Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest awhile,' and then you will be ready for better work. At all events, it is quite possible—if we may so use a phrase which is, perhaps, done violence to in such a use—to water other people's vineyards, and leave our own vines to die for want of tending and irrigation.

There are other currents as well, about which I need not say much here, but no doubt they are running very strong to-day, all round us: tides of opinion and ways of thinking about the gospel which will rob us, if we do not take care, of the simplicity and depth of our faith in that Saviour. I just specify these four currents: time, familiarity, work, and the prevalent tone of the people round about us—all these forces are continually operating on the Christian men and women of this day, and in many cases are doing their deadly work.

II. So let me say that, secondly, my text suggests our security. 'Let us give the more earnest heed.'

Just because these forces are in operation therefore there is more need that the vessel shall be very safely moored to the strong post on the quay, than there would be if it was lying in a tideless harbour where the water was motionless. 'The more earnest heed'—if we know the danger we have gone a long way to escape it. If we will open our eyes to the fact that all about us there are thieves lurking and waiting to steal away our possessions, then we shall have done something towards securing the possessions. As in Christ's parable, there are light-winged flocks of birds filling the air about us, and ready to pounce down upon the seed the moment the sower's back is turned, and with a dig and a peck to pick it up, and then with glancing whir of the wings to be off, bearing away their prey out of sight and out of shot. If we realise that that is the condition of things, we shall have boys with clappers in the field to keep off the birds, at all events. If we have a clear sight of the fact that the world is full of thieves, we shall be likely to get strong locks to our doors, and bars to the windows, and not go to sleep, lest the house should be broken into.

But let me say a word or two about what we ought to do. 'Let us give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard.' That word 'give heed' suggests that there must be a concentration of attention, and a distinct effort of will in the way of resisting the tendencies. If you hold a thing slackly it goes out of your hands. If you have flung a careless bight of the rope round the post, and then lie down to sleep, the force of the stream will do the rest. There must be resistance to the continually acting tendencies, or they will become facts and realities. I have already suggested in the previous remarks what seems to me to be the great thing wanted in our present average

Christian character, and that is the honest occupation of mind and heart with the truths of the gospel. We read newspapers, books, and magazines of all sorts, and we do not read our Bibles as our fathers used to do. There are many professing Christian people who do not make the Word of God familiar by daily and prayerful perusal; and there are many who do not understand much more about the whole majestic orb of divine truth than the one bit of it that they beheld at first, when they turned from darkness to light. That Jesus Christ is your Saviour is, in one sense, the whole gospel, but that is no reason for your not trying to understand all that is involved in, and all that flows from, that great truth, and all on which it rests as upon rock pillars. If we had more honest occupation of thought with, and more quiet feeding like a ruminant animal upon, the truths of the gospel, we might bid defiance to all the currents to sweep us away.

There is another thing by which we may hold ourselves fast moored to these truths—that is, by bringing them habitually to bear upon and to shape and dominate the little things of our daily lives. One way by which we can freshen up the most familiar, commonplace truth is by acting on it. If you will do that, you will find that the old truths have sap and vitality in them yet. People talk about 'toothless commonplaces.' Take the commonplaces of your Christian profession, and conscientiously try to shape your lives by them; and take my word for it, you will find that they are not toothless. There is a bite in them. If a man wants to be confirmed in his creed, let him make it the law of his conduct. So if we will meditate upon the truth, and if we will live the truth, we may snap our fingers at all the currents that seek to draw us away from it.

III. And now one last word. My text suggests the reasons for this exhortation.

You will notice that it begins with a 'therefore,' and that 'therefore' sums up all that has gone before in the epistle; and it is further expanded by a 'for' which follows. And what are the reasons thus suggested? I have no time to enlarge on them, and I do not know that they need it.

They are three, and the first of them is the dignity of the speaker. The writer has just been demonstrating the superiority of the Son by whom 'God hath, in these last times, spoken unto us,' over all former ministers and messengers of His Word, and over all angels before His throne. And he says, because such august lips have spoken, 'Let us give earnest heed to the things which we have heard.' For 'if the words spoken by angels' demanded attention, how much more the word spoken 'in these last times unto us by the Son,' 'whom He hath appointed heir of all things.' That is reason number one.

Reason number two is the steadfastness of the truth. I have been working perhaps till it is threadbare the metaphor underlying my text; I come back to it for a moment more. What is the good of a strong cable, which is my faith, unless it is wrapped round a strong post? Why should I give heed to a truth, unless it is an irrefragable and undeniable and important truth? And so says this writer, it is worth your while to give your whole attention to these truths, and to grapple yourselves to them with hooks of steel, for they stand fast. The word spoken by angels was steadfast, but the word of the gospel was at the first spoken by the

Lord, and was confirmed by them that heard it. He fixed the post; they hammered it in; there it stands. You may hold on to it, and if your tackle does not give, nothing will sweep you away.

And reason number three is, what we lose if we let our moorings there slip. 'For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect . . .'—not *reject*; not *fight against*, simply 'neglect'—'so great salvation,' and so let ourselves be drifted away from the things which we have heard?

MANHOOD CROWNED IN JESUS

'. . . We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus.'—HEB. ii. 8, 9.

ONE of our celebrated astronomers is said to have taught himself the rudiments of his starry science when lying on the hill-side, keeping his father's sheep. Perhaps the grand psalm to which these words refer had a similar origin, and may have come from the early days of the shepherd king, when, like those others of a later day, he abode in the field of Bethlehem, keeping watch over his flock by night. The magnificence of the Eastern heavens, with their 'larger constellations burning,' filled his soul with two opposite thoughts—man's smallness and man's greatness. I suppose that in a mind apt to pensive reflections, alive to moral truths, and responsive to the impressions of God's great universe, the unscientific contemplation of any of the grander forms of nature produces that double effect. And certainly the grandest of them all, which is spread over our heads, little as we dwellers in cities can see the heavens for daily smoke and nightly lamps, forces both these thoughts upon us. They seem so far above us, they swim into their stations night after night, and look down with cold, unchanging beauty on sorrow, and hot strife, and shrieks, and groans, and death. They are so calm, so pure, so remote, so eternal. Thus David felt man's littleness. And yet—and yet, bigness is not greatness, and duration is not life, and the creature that knows God is highest. So the consciousness of man's separation from, and superiority to these silent stars, springs up strong and victorious over the other thought. Remember that, in David's time, the nations near, who were believed to be the very centre of wisdom, had not got beyond the power of these impressions, but on Chaldean plains worshipped the host of heaven. The psalm then is a protest against the most fascinating, and to David's age the most familiar form of idolatry. These great lights are not rulers, but servants; we are more than they, because we have spirits which link us with God.

Then, kindling as he contemplates man as God meant him to be, the poet bursts into rapturous celebration of man's greatness in these respects—that he is visited by God, capable of divine communion, and a special object of divine care; that he is only lower than the loftiest, and that but in small degree and in one specific respect, because they, in their immortal strength, are not entangled in flesh as we; that over all others of God's creatures on earth he is king.

'Very fine words,' may be fairly said; 'but do they correspond to facts? What manhood are you talking about? Where is this being, so close to God, so lowly before Him, so firmly lord of all besides?' That is the question which the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews deals with in our text. He has quoted the psalm as an illustration of his thesis that Christ, and we in Christ, are exalted above angels, and then he proceeds to admit that, as a matter of fact, men are not what David describes them as being. But the psalm is not, therefore, an exaggeration, nor a dream, nor a mere ideal of the imagination. True, as a matter of fact, men are not all this. But as a matter of fact Jesus Christ is, and in His possession of all that the psalm painted our possession is commenced and certified. It *is* an ideal picture, but it is realised in Jesus, and having been so in Him, we have ground to believe that it will be so in us. We see not yet all things put under man—alas no, but—we see Jesus crowned with glory and honour; and as He tasted death for every man, so in His exaltation He is prophecy and pledge that the grand old words shall one day be fulfilled in all their height and depth.

The text, then, brings before us a threefold sight. It bids us *look around*, and if that sadden us, it bids us *look up*, and thence it bids us draw confidence to *look forward*. There is an estimate of present facts, there is a perception by faith of the unseen fact of Christ's glory, and there follows from that the calm prospect for the future for ourselves and for our brethren. Let us deal with these considerations in order.

I. Look at the sight around us.

'We see not yet all things put under man.' Where are the men of whom any portion of the psalmist's words is true? Look at them—are these the men of whom he sings? Visited by God! crowned with glory and honour! having dominion over the works of His hands! Is this irony or fact?

Let consciousness speak. Look at ourselves. If that psalm be God's thought of man, the plan that He hangs up for us His workmen to build by, what a wretched thing my copy of it has turned out to be! Is this a picture of me? How seldom I am conscious of the visits of God; how full I am of weaknesses and imperfections—the solemn voice within me tells me at intervals when I listen to its tones. On my brow there gleams no diadem; from my life, alas! there shines at the best but a fitful splendour of purity, all striped with solid masses of blackness. And as for dominion over creatures, how superficial my rule over them, how real their rule over me! I can tame animals or slay them; I can use the forces of nature for my purposes; I can make machinery, and bid the lightning do my errands and carry messages, the burden of which is mostly money, or power, or sorrow. But all these, and the whole set of things like them, are not ruling over God's creation. That consists in using all for God, and for our own growth in wisdom, strength, and goodness; and he only is master of all things who is servant of God. 'All are yours, and ye are Christ's.' If so, what are most of us but servants, not lords, of earth and its goods? We fasten our very lives on them, we tremble at the bare thought of losing them, we give our best efforts to get them—we say to the fine gold, 'Thou art my confidence.' We do not possess them, they possess us: and so, though materially we may have conquered the earth (and wonderfully proud of it we are now), spiritually, which is the same as to say *really*, the earth has conquered us.

The same impression of human incompleteness is made by all the records of human lives which we possess. Go into a library, and take down volume after volume—the biographies and autobiographies of the foremost men, the saints and sages whom we all reverence. Is there one on whose monument the old psalm could truthfully be written? Are not the honest autobiographies what one of the noblest of them is called, 'Confessions'? Are not the memoirs the stories of flawed excellence, stained purity, limited wisdom? There are no perfect men in them—no men after the pattern of David's words. Or if some enthusiastic admirer has drawn a picture without shadows, we feel that it is without life or likeness; and we look for faults and limitations that we may be sure of brotherhood.

And if we take a wider range, and listen to the sad voice of history chronicling the past, where in all her tragic story of bright hopes brought to nothing, of powers built up by force and rotted down by pride and selfishness, of war and wrong, of good painfully sought, and partially possessed, and churlishly treasured, and quickly lost—where on all her blotted pages, stained with tears, and sweat, and blood, do we find a record that verifies the singer's rapture, and shows us men like this of the Psalm?

Or let observation speak. Bring before your minds, by an exercise of imagination vivifying and uniting into one impression, the facts which we all know of the social and moral condition—to say nothing now of the religious state—of any country upon earth. Think of the men in all lands who are helpless, hopeless, full of animal sins and lusts, full of stupid ignorance. Take our psalm and read it in some gaol, or in a lunatic asylum, or at the door of some gin-palace, or at the mouth of a court in the back streets of any city in England, and ask yourselves, 'Are these people, with narrow foreheads and villainous scowls, with sodden cheeks and foul hands, the fulfilment or the contradiction of its rapturous words?' Or think of naked savages, who look up to bears and lions as their masters, who are stunted by cold or enervated by heat, out of whose souls have died all memories beyond yesterday's hunger, and all hopes greater than a full meal to-morrow—and say if these are God's men. So little are they like it that some of us are ready to say that they are not men at all.

What then? Are we to abandon in despair our hopes for our fellows, and to smile with quiet incredulity at the rhapsodies of sanguine theorists like David? If we are to confine our view to earth—yes. But there is more to see than the sad sights around us. All these men—these imperfect, degraded, half-brutified men—have their share in our psalm. They have gone out and wasted their substance in riotous living; but from the swine-trough and the rags they may come to the best robe and the feast in the father's house. The veriest barbarian, with scarcely a spark of reason or a flickering beam of conscience, sunken in animal delights, and vibrating between animal hopes and animal fears—to him may belong the wondrous attributes: to be visited by God, crowned with glory and honour, higher than all stars, and lord of all creatures.

It sounds like a wild contradiction, I know: and I do not in the least wonder that people pressed by a sense of all the misery that is done under the sun, and faintly realising for themselves Christ's power to heal their own misery and cleanse their own sins, should fling away their Bibles, and refuse to believe that 'God hath made of one blood all nations of men,' and that Christ has a message for the world. I venture to believe both the one and the other. I believe that though angels weep, and we should be smitten with shame, at the sight of what man has made of man, and we of ourselves, yet that God will be true though every man fail Him, and will fulfil unto the children the mercy which He has promised to the fathers. 'All the promises of God in Christ are yea.' And so against all the theories of the desperate school, and against all our own despondent thoughts, we have to oppose the sunny hopes which come from such words as those of our text. Looking around us, we have indeed to acknowledge with plaintive emphasis, 'we see not yet all things put under Him'—but, looking up, we have to add with triumphant confidence that we speak of a fact which has a real bearing on our hopes for men—'we see Jesus.'

II. So, secondly, look upwards to Jesus.

Christ in glory appears to the author of this epistle to be the full realisation of the psalmist's ideal. Our text deals only with the exalted dignity and present majesty of the ascended Lord; but before touching upon that, we may venture, for a moment, to dwell upon the past of Christ's life as being also the carrying out of David's vision of true manhood. We have to look backward as well as upward if we would have a firm hope for men. The ascended Christ upon the throne, and the historical Christ upon the earth, teach us what man may be, the one in regard to dignity, the other in regard to goodness.

Here *is* a fact. Such a life was verily once lived on earth; a life of true manhood, whatever more it was. In it we may see two things: first, we may see from His perfect purity what it is possible for man to become; and second, we may see from His experience who said, 'The Father hath not left Me alone, because

I do always the things which please Him,' how close a fellowship is possible between the human spirit that lives for and by obedience, and the Father of us all. The man Christ Jesus was visited by God, yea, God dwelt with Him ever; whatever more He was—and He was infinitely more—He was also our example of communion, as He was our example of righteousness.

And that life is to be our standard. I refuse to take other men, the highest, as specimens of what we may become. I refuse to take other men, the lowest, as instances of what we are condemned to be. Here in Jesus Christ is the type; and, albeit it is alone in its beauty, yet it is more truly a specimen of manhood than the fragmentary, distorted, incomplete men are who are found everywhere besides. Christ is the power to conform us to Himself, as well as the pattern of what we may be. He and none lower, He and none beside, is the pattern man. Not the great conqueror, nor the great statesman, nor the great thinker, but the great Lover, the perfectly good—is the man as God meant him to be. As it has been said, with pardonable extravagance, 'Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam,' so in sober truth we may affirm that the noblest and fairest characters, approximating as they may to the picture in the psalm, and giving us some reason to hope that more is possible for us than we sometimes think, are after all but fragments of precious stones as compared with that one entire and perfect chrysolite, whose unflawed beauty and completeness drinks in, and flashes forth, the whole light of God. He is not ashamed to call us brethren. Therefore, if we would know what a man is, and what a man may become, let us not only look inward to our own faults, nor around us at these broken bits of goodness, but let us look back to Christ, and be of good cheer. We hear and see more than enough of men's folly, stupidity, godlessness, and sin. Nevertheless—we see Jesus. Let us have hope.

But turn now to the consideration of what is more directly intended by our text, namely, the contemplation of Christ in the heavens, 'crowned with glory and honour,' as the true type of man. What does Scripture teach us to see in the exalted Lord?

It sets before us, first, a perpetual manhood. The whole force of the words before us depends on the assumption that, in all His glory and dominion, Jesus Christ remains what He was on earth, truly and properly man. There is a strong tendency in many minds to think of Christ's incarnation and humanity as transitory. I do not mean that such a conception is thrown into articulate form as a conscious article of belief, but it haunts people none the less, and gives a feeling of unreality and remoteness to what the Scripture says of our Lord's present life. Many believers in the eternal existence and divinity of our Lord think of His incarnation much after the fashion in which heathendom conceived that the gods came down in the likeness of men—as if it were a mere transitory appearance, the wearing of a garb of human nature but for a moment. Whereas the Biblical representation is that for evermore, by an indissoluble union, the human is assumed into the divine, and that 'to-day and for ever' He remains the man Christ Jesus. Nor is a firm grasp of that truth of small importance, nor is the truth itself a theological subtlety, without bearing upon human interests and practical life. Rather it is the very hinge on which turn our loftiest hopes. Without it, that mighty work which He ever carries on, of succouring them that are tempted, and having compassion with us, were impossible. Without that permanent manhood, His mighty work of preparing a place for us, and making heaven a home for men because a Man is its Lord, were at an end. Without it, He in His glory would be no prophecy of man's dominion, nor would He have entered for us into the holy place. Grasp firmly the essential, perpetual manhood of Jesus Christ, and then to see Him crowned with glory and honour gives the triumphant answer to the despairing question that rises often to the lips of every one who knows the facts of life, 'Wherefore hast Thou made all men in vain?'

Again, we see in Jesus, exalted in the heavens, a corporeal manhood. That thought touches upon very dark subjects, concerning which Scripture says little, and no other voice says anything at all. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ are our great reasons for believing that man, in his perfect condition, has body as well as spirit. And that belief is one chief means of giving definiteness and reality to our anticipations of a future life. Without the belief of a corporeal manhood, the unseen world becomes vague and shapeless, is taken out of the range of our faculties altogether, and soon becomes powerless to hold its own against the pressure of palpable, present realities. But we see Jesus—ascended up on high in man's body. Therefore He is somewhere now. Heaven is a place as well as a state; and however, for the present, the souls that sleep in Jesus may have to 'wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body,' and, being unclothed, may be wrapped about with Him and rest in His bosom, yet the perfect men who shall one day stand before the Lord, shall have body and soul and spirit—like Him who is a man for ever, and for ever wears a human frame.

Further, we see in Jesus transfigured manhood.

Once when He was on earth, as some hidden light breaks through all veils, the pent-up glory of the great 'God with us' seemed to stream through His flesh, and tinge with splendour even the skirts of His garments. 'He was transfigured before them,' not as it would appear by light reflected from above, but by radiance up-bursting from within. And besides all its other lessons, that solemn hour on the Mount of Transfiguration gave some small hint and prelude of the possibilities of glory that lay hidden in Christ's material body, which possibilities become realities after (though not, in His case, *by*) death; when He ascended up on high, beautiful and changed, being clothed with 'the body of His glory.' For Him, as for us, flesh here means weakness and dishonour. For us, though not for Him, flesh means corruption and death. For Him, as for us, that natural body, which was adequate to the needs and adapted to the material constitution of this earth, must be changed into the spiritual body correspondent to the conditions of that kingdom of God which flesh and blood cannot enter. For us, through Him, the body of humiliation shall be changed into likeness of the body of His glory. We see Jesus, and in Him manhood transfigured and perfected.

Finally, we see in Jesus sovereign manhood. The psalmist thought of man as crowned with glory and honour, as having dominion over the works of God's hands. And here is his thought embodied in far higher manner than ever he imagined possible. Here is a man exalted to absolute, universal dominion. The sovereignty of Jesus Christ is not a metaphor, nor a rhetorical hyperbole. It is, if we believe the New Testament writers, a literal, prose fact. He directs the history of the world, and presides among the nations. He is the prince of all the kings ot the earth. He wields the forces of nature, He directs the march of providence, He is Lord of the unseen worlds, and holds the keys of death and the grave. 'The government is upon His shoulders,' and upon Him hangs 'all the glory of His Father's house.' Angels served Him in His lowliness, and strengthened Him in His agony they watched His grave, and when He ascended on high, the multitudes of the heavenly hosts, even thousands of angels, were the chariot of the conquering Lord. Angels are His servants now, and all do worship Him. He holdeth the stars in His right hand. and all creatures gather obedient round His throne. His voice is law, His will is power. He says to this one 'Go,' and he goeth; He rebukes winds and seas, diseases and devils, and they obey; to all He says, 'Do this,' and they do it. He speaks, and it is done. 'On His head are many crowns.' Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ—and, seeing Jesus, we see man crowned with glory and honour.

III. Finally, then, look forward.

Though it be only too true that the vision seems to tarry, and that weary centuries roll on, and bring us but so little nearer its accomplishment; though the fair promise, at which the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, seems to have faded away; though the hope of the psalmist is yet unfulfilled; though the strain of a yet higher mood, proclaiming peace on earth, which later shepherds of Bethlehem heard from amid the silent stars, has died away, and the war shout lives on; still, in the strength which flows from seeing Jesus exalted, we can look for a certain future, wherein men shall be all that God proposed, and all that their Saviour is. Rolling clouds hide the full view, but through them gleams the lustrous walls of the city which hath the foundations. We look forward, and we see men sharing in Christ's glory, and gathered together round His throne.

Christ is the measure of man's capacities. He is the true pattern of human nature. Christ is the prophecy and pledge of man's dominion. From Christ comes the power by which the prophecy is fulfilled, and the pattern reproduced in all who love Him. Whosoever is joined to Him receives into his soul that spirit of life in Christ which unfolds and grows according to its own law, and has for its issue and last result the entire conformity between the believing soul and the Saviour by whom it lives. It were a poor consolation to point to Christ and say, 'Look what man has become and may become,' unless we could also say, 'A real and living oneness exists between Him and all who cleave to Him, so that their characters are changed, their natures cleansed, their future altered, their immortal beauty secured.' He is more than pattern, He is power; more than specimen, He is source; more than example, He is redeemer. He has been made in the likeness of sinful flesh, that we may be in the likeness of His body of glory. He has been made 'sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.' His exaltation, if it were ever so much a fact, and ever so firmly believed, yields no basis for hope as to any beyond Himself, but on one supposition. To see man exalted and his glory ensured in Christ's, the glory of Christ must be connected, as is done in our text, with His tasting death for every man. When I know that He has died for me, and for all my brethren who sit in darkness, and hear each other groan as the poison shoots through their veins, then I can feel that, as He has been in the likeness of our death, we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. Brethren, the Cross, and the Cross alone, certifies our participation in the Crown. Unless Jesus Christ have and exercise that wondrous power of delivering from sin and self, and of quickening to a new life, which He exercises only as Sacrifice and Saviour, there were nothing which were more irrelevant to the hopes of man's future than the story of His purity and of His dominion. What were all that to men writhing with evil? What hope for single souls or for the world in the knowledge that He was good, or in the belief that He had gone up on high? If that were all, what would it all matter? The lack-lustre eyes that have grown wan with waiting will have no light of hope kindled in them by such a gospel as that. But bid them look, languid and weary as they are, to Him who is lifted up, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish—that vision will give to the still loftier sight of Christ on the throne its true meaning, as not a barren triumph for Himself alone, but as victory for us—yea, our victory in Him. If we can say, 'God, who is rich in mercy for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together,' then we can add, 'and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Jesus Christ.'

And what wonderful hopes, dimly discerned indeed, but firmly founded, we have a right to cherish, if what we see in Jesus we may predict for His brethren! We shall be like Him in all these points to which we have already referred. We, too, shall have a corporeal manhood transfigured and glorified. We, too, shall have perfect union and communion with the Father. We, too, shall be invested with all the unknown prerogatives which are summed up in that last promise of His, beyond which nothing more glorious can be conceived, 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me on My throne.' Then the ancient word will be fulfilled in manner beyond our dreams, 'Thou hast put all things under his feet.' Who can tell what accessions of power, what new faculties, what new relations to an external universe, what new capacity of impressing a holy will upon all things, what new capability of receiving from all things their most secret messages concerning God their Maker, may be involved in such words? We see darkly. The hopes for the future lie around us as flowers in some fair garden where we walk in the night, their petals closed and their leaves asleep, but here and there a whiter bloom gleams out, and sweet, faint odours from unseen sources steal through the dewy darkness. We can understand but little of what this majestic promise of sovereign manhood may mean. But the fragrance, if not the sight, of that gorgeous blossom is wafted to us. We know that 'the upright shall have dominion in the morning.' We know that to His servants authority over ten cities will be given. We know that we shall be 'kings and priests to God.' The fact we know, the contents of the fact we wait to prove. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' Enough that we shall reign with Him, and that in the kingdom of the heavens dominion means service, and the least is the greatest.

We, too, shall be exalted above all creatures—far above all principality and power, even as Christ is

Lord of angels. What that may include, we can but dimly surmise. Nearness to God, knowledge of His heart and will, likeness to Christ, determine superiority among pure and spiritual beings. And Scripture, in many a hint and half-veiled promise, bids us believe that men who have been redeemed from their sins by the blood of Christ, and have made experience of departure and restoration, are set to be the exponents of a deeper knowledge of God to powers in heavenly places, and, standing nearest the throne, become the chorus leaders of new praises from lofty beings who have ever praised Him on immortal harps. They who know sin, who remember sorrow, who learned God by the Cross of Christ, and have proved His forgiving and sanctifying grace, must needs have a more wondrous knowledge, and be knit to Him by a tenderer bond than the elder brethren who never transgressed His commandments. The youngest brother of the king is nearer to him than the oldest servant who stands before his face. Our brother is Lord of all, and His dominion is ours.

But we can speak little, definitely, about such matters. It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord. This confidence, which can be certain, though it be not accurate, should satisfy our minds without curious detail, and should quiet our hearts however they be tempted to cast it away. Many enemies whisper to us doubts. The devil tempted first to sin by insinuating the question, 'Shall ye surely die?' The devil often tempts now to sin by insinuating exactly the opposite doubt, 'Can it be that you will live?' It seems to us often incredible that such hopes of immortal life should be true about such poor creatures, such wretched failures, as we feel ourselves to be. It seems often incredible that they should have any connection with men such as we see them on the average to be. We are tempted, too, in these days, to think that our psalm belongs to an exploded school of thought, to a simple astronomy which made the earth the centre of the universe, and conceived of moon and stars as tiny spangles on the hem of light's garment. We are told that science lights us to other conclusions as to man's place in creation than such as David cherished. No doubt it does as to man physically considered. But the answer to my own evil conscience, to the sad inferences from man's past and present, to the conclusions which are illegitimately sought to be extended from man's material place in a material universe to man's spiritual place as an immortal and moral being, lies in that twofold sight which we have been regarding—Christ on the cross the measure of man's worth in the eyes of God, and of man's place in the creation; Christ on the throne the prophecy of man's dignity, and of his most sure dominion.

When bordering on despair at the sight of so much going wrong, so much ignorance, sorrow, and vice, so many darkened understandings and broken hearts, such wide tracts of savagery and godlessness, I can look up to Jesus, and can see far, far away—the furthest thing on the horizon—like some nebula, faint, it is true, and low down, but flickering with true starry light—the wondrous vision of many souls brought into glory, even a world redeemed.

When conscious of personal imperfection and much sin, no thought will bring peace nor kindle hope but this, that Christ has died to bring me to God, and lives to bring me to glory. Then, dear brethren, 'behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world'

Behold Jesus entered within the veil for us. Look away from the imperfect men, the partial teachers, the incomplete saints, the powerless helpers around you, to Him, the righteous, the wise, the strong. Look at no man any more, as the hope for yourself, as the pattern for your life, save Jesus only. The gaze will feed your triumphant hope, and will make that hope a partial reality. Here you will be visited by God, here you will in some degree have all things for yours, if you are Christ's. Here, from far beneath, look up through the heavens to Him who is 'made higher than' them all. And hereafter, from the supreme height and pinnacle of the throne of Christ, we shall look down on sun, moon, and stars that once shone so far above us; and conscious that His grace has raised us up on high, and put all things under our feet, shall exclaim with yet deeper thankfulness and more reverent wonder: 'What is man, that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man, that Thou visitest him?'

CHRIST'S PERFECTING BY SUFFERING

'It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.'—HEB. ii. 10.

IT does not 'become' us to be hasty or confident in determining what 'becomes' God. We had need to know the divine nature more perfectly, and the bearings of His actions more comprehensively and clearly than we do, before it can be safe to reject anything on the ground that it is unworthy of the divine nature Perhaps we have not quite got to the bottom of the bottomless; perhaps men's conceptions do not precisely constitute the standard to which God is bound to conform. It is unsafe to pronounce that a given thing is unworthy of Him. It is much safer to pronounce that a given thing is worthy of Him.

And that is what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews does here, venturing upon ground on which the New Testament seldom enters, viz., the vindication of the doctrine of a suffering Christ, on the ground of its being congruous with the divine nature that He should suffer. Especially would such a thought be appropriate and telling to the audience to whom it was originally addressed. 'We preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling-block,' says Paul. And that doctrine of a suffering Messiah was the thing that stood in the way of the Jewish reception of the gospel, more perhaps than anything besides. So here we have the writer turning the tables upon the people, who might oppose it, on the ground of that discord and incongruity, and asserting that the whole of the sufferings of Jesus Christ do entirely harmonise with, are worthy of, and 'become' the supreme and absolute sovereignty of the God 'for whom are all things, and by whom are all things.'

There are three points, then, to which I desire to turn. There is first, the great sweep of the divine purpose. There is, secondly, the apparently paradoxical method of effecting it; and there is, finally, the assertion of the entire congruity between that method and the divine nature.

I. First of all, then, regard for a few moments the great sweep of the divine action in the gift of Christ as it is set forth here.

It is 'bringing many sons unto glory,' wherein there lies, of course, a metaphor of a great filial procession, being led on through all changes of this lower life, steadily upwards into the possession of what is here called 'glory.' The same metaphor colours the other expression of our text, 'the Captain of our salvation.' For the word translated 'Captain,' which only occurs some four times in Scripture, literally means one who leads, or begins any course or thing; and hence comes to mean a commander, or a prince, as it is twice translated; and then again, with a very easy transition from the notion of leading to that of origination, it comes to mean 'cause' or 'author,' as it is once translated. The conception of 'author' is the dominant one here, but it is also coloured by the prolongation of the metaphor in the previous clause. This great procession of sons up into glory, which is the object and aim of God's work, is all under the leadership of Him who is the Captain, the foremost, the Originator, and, in a profound sense, the Cause, of their salvation.

So, then, we have before us the thought that God brings, and yet Christ leads, and God's bringing is effected through Christ's leadership. Then we have other thoughts, upon which time will not allow me to dwell. Let me just indicate them to you for your own expansion.

Look at the extent of the divine act. 'Many' is used not in contrast to 'all,' as if there was proclaimed here a restricted application of Christ's work in the divine idea; but 'many' is in opposition to 'few,' or, perhaps, in opposition to the One. There is One Leader, and there is an indefinite number of followers. The connotation of the word 'many' is the idea of uncounted number. This great procession, with its long and interminable files, sweeps onward under the guidance of the one Captain. So wide as to be universal is the sweep of God's purpose to bring the 'many,' a 'multitude that no man can number,' into the possession of His glory.

Then, note, the relationship which the members of that great company possess. The many are being brought as 'sons'; under the leadership of the one Son. That opens out into the broad thought that the loftiest conception of God's end in redemption is the making the 'many' like the One, and the investing of them all with every privilege and dignity which belongs to their Leader.

Then note, further, the end of the march. This great company stretching numberless away beyond the range of vision, and all exalted into the dignity of sons, is steadfastly pressing onwards to the aim of fulfilling that divine ideal of humanity, long since spoken in the psalm, which in its exuberant promises sounds liker irony than hope. 'Thou crownest Him with glory and honour.' They are not only steadily marching onwards to the realisation of that divine ideal, but also to the participation of the glory of the Captain who is the 'brightness of the Father's glory,' as well as 'the express image of His person.' So again, the underlying thought is the identity, as in fate here, so in destiny hereafter, of the army with its Leader. He is the Son, and the divine purpose is to make the 'many' partakers of His Sonship. He is the realisation of the divine ideal. We see not yet all things put under man, but we see Jesus, and so we know that the ancient hope is not the baseless fabric of a vision, nor a dream which will pass when we awake to the realities, but is to be fulfilled in every one, down to the humblest private in that great army, all of whom shall partake in their measure and degree in the glory of the Lord.

This, then, being the purpose,—the leading up out of the world into the glory, of a great company of sons who are conformed to the image of the Son—we attain the point from which we may judge of the adaptation of the means to the end. We cannot tell whether a thing is congruous with the nature of the doer of it till we know what the doer intended by the act. Inadequate conceptions of God's purpose in Christ's mission are sure to lead, as they always have led, to inadequate conceptions of the means to be adopted, and doubts of their congruity with the divine nature. If Christ's mission is only meant to reveal to us a little more clearly truth concerning God and man, if He is only meant to stand before us as the ideal of conduct, and the pattern for our imitation, then there is no need for a Cross, which adds nothing to these; but if He has come to redeem, if He has come to turn slaves into sons, if He has come to lift men up from the mud and earthliness of their low and sensuous careers, and to set them upon the path that will lead them to share in the glory of God, then there is something more needed than would be adequate for the work of a Teacher howsoever wise, or than would be required for the work of an Example however beautiful and fair. The Cross is surplusage if Christ be a prophet only; it is surplusage and an incongruity if Christ be simply the foremost of the pure natures that have walked the earth, and shown the beauty of goodness. But if Christ has come to make men sons of God, by participation of His sonship, and to blanch and irradiate their blackness by the reflection and impartation of His own flashing glory, then it 'became Him, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.'

II. That leads me to the next point that is here, viz., the paradox of the method adopted to carry out this divine purpose.

Of course, I do not need to explain, I suppose, that the 'perfecting through sufferings,' which is here declared to take effect upon our Lord, does not mean the addition of anything to, or the purging away of anything from, His moral nature. You and I are refined by suffering, which purges out our dross, if we take it rightly. You and I are ennobled by suffering, which adds to us, if we rightly accept it, that which without it we could never possess. But Christ's perfecting is not the perfecting of His moral character, but the completion of His equipment for His work of being the Captain of our salvation. That is to say, He Himself, though He learned obedience by the things that He suffered, was morally perfect, ere yet one shadow of pain or conflict had passed across the calm depths of His pure spirit. But He was not ready for His function of Leader and Originator of our salvation until He had passed through the sufferings of life and the agonies of death. Thus the whole sweep of Christ's sufferings, both those which preceded the Cross, and especially the Cross itself, are included in the general expression of my text; and these equipped Him for His work.

So we learn this lesson, the Captain who comes to make the soldiers like Himself can only accomplish His purpose by becoming like the soldiers. The necessity for our Lord's sufferings is mainly based in the text here upon the simple principle that He who is to deliver men must be a Man. The leader must have no exemption from the hardships of the company. If He is to be a leader, He and we must go by the same road. He must tramp along all the weary path that we have to tread. He must experience all the conflicts and difficulties that we have to experience. He cannot lift us up into a share of His glory unless He stoops to the companionship of our grief. No man upon a higher level can raise one on a lower, except on condition of Himself going down, with His hand at any rate, to the level from which He would lift. And no Christ will be able to accomplish the Father's design, except a Christ that knows the fellowship of *our* sufferings, and is made conformable unto *our* death. Therefore because 'He took not hold to help angels, but the seed of Abraham, it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren.' And when the soldiers are weary on the march, footsore and tired, they bethink themselves 'Headquarters were here yesterday.'

'We can go through no darker rooms
Than He went through before.'

And where He has stretched Himself on the cold ground and bivouacked, we need not be ashamed or afraid to lie down. The Captain of our salvation has gone through and shared all our hardships, and plodded with bleeding feet over every inch of the ground over which He would lead us.

Again, we learn the necessity of His suffering in order to His sympathy. Before He suffers, He has the pity of a God; after He suffers He has learnt the compassion of a man. And though in the fight the general seems to have gone up the hill, and left the army to struggle in the plain, He has gone like Moses to the mount to lift all-powerful hands of intercession, and bearing in His heart tender compassion, a fellow-feeling of our pains. No Christ is worth anything to me, suffering and bleeding and agonising here, unless

He be a Christ of whom I know that His heart is full of sympathy because Himself has felt the same, and that He has learnt to run to the help of the miserable, because He Himself is not ignorant of misfortune.

Then we learn, further, the necessity of the Captain's suffering in order to emancipate us from the dominion of the evil that He bears. No doctrine of identification with our common infirmities, or sympathy in regard of our daily trials is adequate to explain, or to reach to the depths of this paradox of a crucified Commander. We need another thought than that, and it lies in this. 'He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' The necessity for knowing all our condition and sharing it was not the only necessity that brought Christ to suffer and to die. But upon Him was gathered the whole mass and blackness of human sin, and in His separation from the Father, and in the outward fact of death, He bare our miseries, and by His stripes we were healed. No Christ is enough for me a sinner except a Christ whose Cross takes away the burden and the penalty of my transgression. And thus 'it became Him to make the Captain of salvation perfect through suffering,' else the design of making men His sons and sharers of His glory could never come to pass.

III. Therefore, lastly, mark the harmony between the loftiest conception of the divine character and nature and these sufferings of Jesus.

The writer dwells upon two aspects of God's relation to the universe. 'It became Him *for* whom are all things, and *by* or through whom are all things.' That is to say, the sufferings and death of the Christ, in whom is God manifest in the flesh, are worthy of that lofty nature to the praise and glory of which all things contribute. The Cross is the highest manifestation of the divine nature. The paradox remains that a dying man should more worthily set forth the deep heart of God, and should therefore more completely realise the divine purpose that all things should be for His glory, than all besides can do. Creation witnesses of Him, providence witnesses of Him, these marvellous spirits of ours proclaim His praise, but the deep heart of God, like some rich fruit, if I may so say, is cleft open by the Cross, and all its treasures laid bare, as they are displayed nowhere besides. So the purpose—which may be so stated as to be only Almighty selfishness, but which is really the expression of Almighty love—the purpose of God that all creation should redound to His honour, and be '*for* Him,' reaches its end through the suffering of Jesus Christ, and in Him, and in His death God is glorified. 'It became Him, for whom are all things, to perfect through suffering the Captain of our salvation.'

Another aspect, closely connected with this, lies in that other clause. Christ's sufferings and death are congruous with that Almighty power by which the Universe has sprung into being and is sustained. His creative agency is not the highest exhibition of His power. Creation is effected by a word. The bare utterance of the divine will was all that was needed to make the heavens and the earth, and 'to preserve the stars from wrong.' But the bare utterance of will is not enough here. If men are to be brought to glory, they cannot be brought by the mere desire of God to bring them, or by the mere utterance of His will that they should be brought. This work needs a process needs that something should be done. This work needs the humiliation, the suffering, the death, resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God, of the Captain of our salvation and the Prince of our life.

So though by Him are all things, if we would know the full sweep and Omnipotence of His power, He points us away from creation, and its ineffectual fires that pale before this brighter Light in which His whole self is embodied, and says, 'There, *that* is the arm of the Lord made bare in the sight of all the nations.' Omnipotence has made the world, the Cross has redeemed it. From that Cross there come the loftiest conceptions of Him for whom all things are, but for whom men are *not* unless the Cross has won them; by whom are all things, but by whom men are, through more wondrous exercise of divine power, when they are redeemed by the precious blood, than when they were made by the creative fiat.

Therefore, brethren, listen to God saying, 'I have set Him for a witness to the people, for a Leader and a Commander to the people,' and see to it that you enlist in this Captain's army, and follow His banners and trust in His Cross, that your sufferings may be His, and the merit of His may be yours, and that in His sonship you may be sons, and the flashings of His glory may change your earthliness from glory to glory, into the image of the Son, made perfect through suffering and crowned with glory and honour, which He parts among all His soldiers.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF CHRIST

'. . . He is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12. Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto Thee. 13. And again, I will put My trust in Him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given Me.'—Heb. ii. 11-13.

'Not ashamed to call them brethren.' Why should He be? It is no condescension to acknowledge the fact of brotherhood, any more than it is humility to be born. And yet there is One who had to empty and humble Himself in becoming man; and for whom to call men His brethren is a depth of unimaginable condescension. We would say that a prince was not ashamed to call his subjects his friends, and to eat and drink with them, but we should not say it of a subject. This word 'ashamed' is meaningless in the present connection unless there underlies it the lofty conception of Christ's person which is enfolded in the first chapter of this epistle. If He be, and only if He is, the 'brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of His person,' is it condescension in Him to enrol Himself amongst our fraternity.

The writer selects three Old Testament passages which he thinks exhibit in prophetic outline the Messiah as claiming brotherhood with men. If the writer had known the gospels, he could have found other words that would have been even more weighty, such as 'Behold My mother and My brethren'; but probably he was ignorant of them; or possibly, writing to Jews, he may have felt that to use their own manner of exposition was the best way of reaching them.

It would lead us into discussions altogether unsuited to the pulpit to examine the relevance of these three prophetic quotations. My object is a different one. The three citations from the Old Testament, which are adduced in my text as proofs that the Messiah identifies Himself with His brethren, deal with three different aspects of our Lord's manhood; and if we take them altogether, they afford, if not a complete, yet a very comprehensive answer to the question why God became man. It is from that point of view that I desire to consider them here.

There are, then, three points here; (1) Christ's assumption of manhood in order to show God to men (2) Christ's assumption of manhood in order to show the pattern of a godly life to men; and (3) Christ's assumption of manhood in order to bring men into the family of sons.

I. First, then, here we have the declaration or manifestation of God as the great object of Christ's brotherhood with us, 'Saying, I will declare Thy name unto My brethren.'

Where do these words come from? They come from that psalm, the first words of which rang out from His lips amidst the darkness of eclipse upon the Cross, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' The psalm, springing directly from the heart of David, and expressing to his consciousness, I suppose, solely his own feelings in the midst of his own trials and humiliations, has yet been so moulded into language a world too wide for the writer's sorrows, and so corresponding in minute and singular details, with the historical facts of Christ's passion and death, that we cannot fail to perceive shimmering through the words of the earthly King who won His throne through persecutions and trials, the august figure of the loftier and true King, of whom the sovereign of

Israel was, ex-officio, a type and a prophecy. Just as David felt that he, as monarch, must be the brother of his subjects, and that the meaning of his reign and of his deliverance was the declaration of the name of God to his brethren, so our King can only be King if He be brother; and the inmost purpose of His brotherhood and of His monarchy is that He may manifest to men the name of the Father.

What is that 'name'? The syllables by which men call Him? Surely not. But the name of the Lord is the manifest character of God; and therefore the only possible way of declaring Him is not by words but by acts. A person can only be revealed by a person. God can only be shown to men by a life. Words will never do it; they may represent men's thinkings, but they never can certify God's fact. Words will never do it, they may suggest hopes, fears, peradventures; but unless we have a living Person whose deeds on the plain level of human history, and in this solid world of ours, are the manifestation of God, our thoughts of Him will neither be solid with certainty nor sweet with comfort. It must be a human life which is more than a human life, but yet is thoroughly and altogether man, that to men can manifest God. Our highest conceptions of the divine nature must be in the form of man. Between the little sphere of the dewdrop and the great sphere of the sun that is reflected prismatically in it, there is absolute identity in the laws that shape their round. So limited humanity has such an analogy with unlimited divinity as that, in the mirror of manhood, the brilliancy and ineffable brightness of the Godhead can be manifested. That life, the life of Jesus Christ, is the making visible for men of the glory of the invisible God.

And what is the substance of the declaration? Men point us to His miracles, to the omniscience, to the power, to the other attributes of majesty, unlike to, and contradictory, of the attributes of finite humanity, and they say that these are the glory of God. Not so! That is a vulgar conception: high above all such as these towers the moral perfectness which is manifested in the purity of Jesus Christ. But when we have passed through what I may call the physical attributes revealed in the miracles which are the outer court, and the moral attributes of righteousness and stainlessness, which are the holy place, there is yet a veil to be lifted, and an inner sanctuary; and in it, there is nothing but a Mercy-seat, and a Shekinah above it. Which, being translated into plain English, is just this, the new thing in Christ's declaration of the name of the Father is the love of God therein manifested. Other means of knowing Him give us fragmentary syllables of His name, and men do with the witness of nature, and the ambiguous witness of history, and the witness of our own intuitions, what antiquarians do with the broken, inscribed blocks which they find in ruins, piece them together, and try to make a sentence out of them. But the whole name is in Christ. God 'who hath spoken in divers manners' elsewhere, hath spoken the whole syllables of His manifest character in His Son. And this is the shining apex of all; the last utterances of Scripture, the culmination of all the long procession of self-manifestation—'God is love.' You can only learn that when you look on your brother Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Dear brethren, more and more is it becoming certain, as the tendencies of modern thought unfold themselves, that we are brought to this fork in the road—

Christ or nothing! Either God manifest in Him, or no manifestation of God at all. Theism or Deism has not substance enough to sustain the assaults of the modern scientific spirit. Unless 'the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father He hath declared Him,' no man hath seen God at any time, or can see Him. It is Christ or darkness. Either the Father revealed in Him, or a God spelled with a little 'g,' who is an unverifiable and unnecessary hypothesis, or 'a stream of tendency not ourselves that makes for righteousness'; or a vague somewhat concerning whom we only know that He cannot be known. The cultivated mind of England has to make its choice this day between these two. And when we come back to Christ, declaring the name of the Father unto His brethren, the nebulous, doleful grey that veiled the sky disappears, and we feel the sun again, and regain a God whom we can love because He has an ear and a heart and a hand; a God of whom we can be sure, a God concerning whom we have not to say 'I think'; 'I hope'; 'I fear'; 'perhaps'; but a God whom we can *know*, and 'to know whom is life eternal.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the thoughts here. Secondly, we have Christ's brotherhood represented as intended to show to men the pattern of the religious life. 'I will put my trust in Him.'

These words came probably from the eighth chapter of the book of Isaiah, where the prophet, like the king in the former narrative, speaking altogether his own feelings, and with no consciousness of any prophetic or typical reference, expresses his personal dependence upon God. Our writer sees in Isaiah, as the chief of the prophetic order, which order in its totality was a prophecy or type of Jesus Christ, a dim shadow of

Jesus, in so far as the prophet, though filled with the consciousness of a divine inspiration, and knowing that he stood before his brethren to make known to them the name of God, did not yet thereby feel himself absolved from the necessity of personal dependence and reliance on Him. And, says our writer, as it was with that foremost of the prophets, so is it with Him who is the Prophet by eminence. He, too, in His manhood and in His office of declaring the name of the Father, feels that for Him personally there must be the same faith in God which others exercise.

Now that is the point to which I want to turn for a moment. Jesus Christ is the object of our faith. Yes! but Jesus Christ is the example of our faith too. You orthodox people, who believe in the divinity of our Lord and Saviour, are far too much afraid of fronting such thoughts as this. They are not so familiar to us as they ought to be. We do not believe in His thorough manhood, some of us, nor in His real divinity, but in a strange amalgam of the two, each destroying, to a certain extent, the quality of the other. And so the men who do know their own mind, and who know His simple manhood, will make wild work of the beliefs of some of those who call themselves orthodox believers.

A perfect manhood must needs be a dependent manhood. A reasonable creature who does not live by faith is either God or devil: Jesus Christ's perfect manhood, sinless, stainless, did not absolve Him from, but obliged Him to, a life of continual dependence upon God; His divinity did not, in the smallest measure, interfere with the reality of the faith which, as man, He exercised, and which was the same in kind as ours.

His perfect manhood modifies and perfects His faith. In Him dependence had no relation to a consciousness of sinfulness, as it must have in us, but in Him it had relation to a consciousness of need of a continual derivation of life and power from the Father; His faith being the faith of a perfect manhood, was a perfect faith. Our hands tremble as they hold the telescope that looks into the far-off unseen. His hand was steady. Our faith wavers and is interrupted, an intermittent fountain. His was a perennial flow. His perfect faith issued in perfect results in His life; in a perfect obedience, 'I do always the things that please Him,' and in a perfect communion. Like two metal plates of which the surfaces are so true that when you bring them into contact they adhere, that perfect nature of Jesus Christ's, by the exercise of its perfect faith, clung in unbroken fellowship to the Father—'He hath not left me alone, because I do always the things that please Him.'

And thus, dear brethren, our brother does not stand above us only to show us God, but comes down amongst us to show us men. Out of His example of faith we may take both shame and encouragement—shame when we consider the awful disparity between our wavering and His fixed faith; encouragement when in Him we see what humanity has in it to become, and what by the path of faith it may become. The staff that He leaned on He has bequeathed to us. The shield that He carried in the conflict in the wilderness, when He said, 'Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,' and which He bore undinted by all the fiery darts through His earthly course, He has bequeathed to us His followers. The Captain, the Emperor, was once in the arena, and there He struggled. He, the Captain of the faith, the Leader of the hosts of believers, conquered because He said 'I will put my trust in Him'; and He has left us the same weapon for ours, that we, too, may conquer. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

III. Lastly, we have our Lord's manhood represented here as the means by which He brings us into a family of sons. 'And again, behold, I and the children which God hath given Me.'

These words come from the immediate neighbourhood of the last quotation. In their original application the prophet regards his own family, and the little knot of disciples who had been drawn to him, as being associated with him in his prophetic office, set for 'signs and wonders,' and the salt of the nation, which without them was rotting to dissolution. So our writer sees in the prophet's humility, which associates in his office, and admits to its prerogatives, the children to whom he had given natural life, and the little ones who through him had received spiritual life, the dim foreshadowing of that great Saviour who by His becoming our Brother, makes us God's children.

For it is to be noticed that the unity referred to in the word 'children,' in this last quotation, does not apply to the same sphere as the unity referred to in the former word 'brethren.' 'Brethren' referred to the kindred which consisted of the common possession of humanity; 'children' refers to the kindred, consisting in the common possession of spiritual life. Thus, in this last quotation of our text we have presented the other side of Christ's Incarnation and its effects. Here we have to deal, not so much with His becoming like us, as with our becoming like Him.

The words open out into thoughts which I can only specify without attempting to enlarge upon them. Jesus Christ has become our Brother, that from Him we may each of us draw a life, stored in Him, though having its source in God, which will make us His brethren, and God's children. The central blessing of the gospel is the communication to every trustful heart of an actual divine life which comes from Christ. Do not be satisfied with any more superficial conception of what God gives us in His Son than this, that He gives us a spark of Himself, that He comes into us through Christ, and bestows upon our deadness a real, mystical, spiritual life, which will unfold itself in forms worthy of its kindred, and like unto its source.

For that gift of the life there is more than Incarnation needed. There is Crucifixion needed. The death of Death by death gives Death his death; and then, and then only, can He give us who were dead His life. The box must be broken, though it be alabaster very precious, that through its lustrous surface there may shine lambent the light of the indwelling spirit; the body must be broken, that the house may be filled with the odour of the ointment. Christ dies and life escapes from Him as it were, and passes into the world.

That life is a life of sonship. The children are God's children, being Christ's brethren. They are brought into a new unity; and the one foundation of true brotherhood amongst men is the common possession of a common relation to the One Divine Father.

And that life which leads thus to sonship leads likewise to a marvellous participation in the offices, functions and relations of the Christ who bestows it. Just as the prophet gathered his children and disciples into a family, and gave them to partake in his prophetic office, in his relation to God, and to the world, so Christ gathers us into oneness with Himself; having become like us, He makes us like Him and invests us with a similar relationship to the Father. Being the Son, He gives us the adoption of sons, and lays upon our shoulders the responsibilities and the honours of a similar relation to the world, making us kindled 'lights' derived from Himself the fontal source, making us, in our measure and degree, sons of God and Messiahs for the world.

This oneness of life—which thus leads to a participation in sonship, an identity of function, and of interest—remains for ever. If we love and trust Christ, He will never leave us until He 'presents us faultless before the presence of His glory, with exceeding joy.'

So, dear friends, it all comes to this; there is one way to know God and only one. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' All else is darkness. There is one life, noble, pure, worthy of humanity, and only one: the life of trust in Christ, who is at once the object and pattern of our faith; and believing in whom we believe in the Father also. There is but one fountain of life opened in the graveyard of this world, and that is in the Son, drinking of whom there shall be in us a fountain springing up to life everlasting. There is but one way by which we can become sons of God, through the elder Brother, who grudges the prodigal neither the ring nor the feast, but Himself has provided them both. So listen to Him declaring the name; say, 'I will put my trust in Him'; for you trust God when you have faith in Christ; and then be sure that He will give you of His own life; that He will invest you with the spirit of adoption and the standing of sons, that He will keep His hand about you, and never lose you. 'Them whom Thou hast given Me, I have kept,' He will say at last, pointing to us; and there we shall stand, 'no wanderer lost, a family in Heaven,' whilst our brother presents us to His Father and ours, with the triumphant words—'Behold I and all the children whom Thou hast given Me.'

WHAT BEHOVED CHRIST

'Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.'
HEB. ii. 17.

I BRING these words: 'It behoved Him,' into connection with similar words in an earlier verse of the chapter, on which I was lately preaching: 'It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.'

In the latter words the sufferings of Jesus Christ and His consequent perfecting for His work of Messiah are considered, in an aspect somewhat unusual with scripture writers, as being in accordance with the divine nature, and worthy of God. 'He, by whom are all things,' had no other way of effecting His highest purpose of redemption than through the sufferings of Jesus Christ. 'He, for whom are all things, could win men to be for Him only through these sufferings. And so the paradox of the Cross was worthy of God and like Him. In my text the same series of historical facts, the life of Jesus Christ and His death, considered as a whole, are regarded not as worthy of God, but as that which 'behoved' Christ. 'It behoved' is stronger than 'it became.' The one phrase points to the conformity of the thing in question with God's character and nature; the other declares that the thing in question has in it a moral necessity or obligation, and that Christ's assimilation to His fellows, especially in all the ills that flesh is heir to, was laid upon Him as a necessity, in view of His purpose of redemption and the helping of His fellows.

So then we have here, in the words which I have read, and in the context, three thoughts on which I touch now. First of all, the completeness of Christ's assimilation to us, especially in regard to suffering; second, Christ's sufferings as necessary for the fulfilment of Christ's design; and lastly and more especially, Christ's sufferings as indispensable for His priestly office.

Now look at these three things briefly.

I. Note, first of all, the emphasis of that expression, 'it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren.' And observe that the 'all things' here, concerning which our Lord's likeness to mankind is predicated, are not the ordinary properties of human nature, but emphatically and specifically man's sorrows.

That will appear, I think, if you notice that my text is regarded as being a consequence of our Lord's incarnation for the help of His fellows. 'He laid not hold upon angels, but He laid hold upon the seed of Abraham.' *Wherefore,* 'in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.'

Now, if the likeness here be the possession of true manhood, then my text is mere tautology, and it would simply be saying, 'He became a man, wherefore it behoved Him to become a man.' The same conclusion is, I think, fairly to be deduced from the last words of our chapter, where the fact of His suffering being tempted, is stated as His preparation to help, and as

His qualification as a merciful and faithful High Priest. That is to say, the 'all things' of which our Lord became partaker like us His brethren, are here the whole mass —in all its variety of pressure and diversity of nauseousness and bitterness—the whole mass of human sorrow which has ever made men's hearts bleed and men's eyes weep. Christ, in His single manhood, says the writer, gathered unto Himself every form of pain, of misery, of weariness, of burden, which can weigh upon and wear out a human spirit; and no single ingredient that ever made any man's cup distasteful was left out, in that dreadful draught which He emptied to the dregs ere He passed the chalice to our lips, saying, 'Drink ye all of it.'

This is the great lesson and blessed thought of our text that no suffering soul, no harassed heart, no lonely life, has ever been able to say, 'Ah! I have to bear this by myself, for Jesus Christ never knew anything like this.' All the pain and sorrow of adverse circumstances, that try some of us, He knows who had 'not where to lay His head'; who was a poor man all His days, to whom the women had to minister of their charity, and who depended upon others for His sustenance in life, and for cerements, and a grave in death. The sorrows that belong to a physical frame overwrought and crushed by excessive toil; the sorrows of weakness, of sickness, the pains of death—He understands them all. The sorrows that come from our relations to our fellows, whether they be the hopeless, quiet tears that fall for ever upon broken affections and lost loves, or whether they be the bitter griefs that come from unrequited affections and unappreciated aims, and benefits flung back, and hearts tortured by ingratitude—He knows them all. And the loftier and less selfish, more impersonal, griefs that make so large a portion of the weight and heaviness of the noblest spirits, they all cast their shadows across His pure soul, and the shadow was the deeper and the darker because of the very purity of the soul on which it fell. Purity is ever sad in the presence of foulness; and love is ever sorrowful when bowed with the burden of another's sorrow; and both these sources of pain and grief, which diffuse their bitterness through the lives of the best men, weighed in all their gravity upon Him who felt the world's sorrow and the world's sin as a personal grief because His soul was perfectly unselfish, perfectly pure, perfectly united to God, and therefore perfectly clear-sighted. All the miseries of all men forced themselves into and filled Christ's heart.

Dear brother! you and I have but a drop given to us; He drank the whole cup. Our natures are not capable of sorrow as varied, as deep, as poignant as the sorrow of Jesus Christ; but for each of us surely the assurance comes with some subtle power of consolation and strength, 'In all their afflictions He was afflicted'; and none of us can ever meet a sorrow with whose face Christ was not familiar, and which He Himself has not conquered for us.

II. So that brings me to the next point suggested here, viz., our Lord's varied, all-comprehensive sorrow was a necessity imposed upon Him by the purpose which He had in view.

The context gives us that assertion in distinct language. Adopting the improved and accurate rendering of the Revised Version of the previous verse, we read, 'Verily not of angels doth He take hold, but He taketh hold of the seed of Abraham; wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.'

Now the word rendered here, 'taketh hold,' is the same word which is employed in the narrative of a very striking incident in the gospels, where the Apostle Peter is ready to sink in the water; and Jesus Christ 'stretched forth His hand and *caught* him.' And that story may serve as an illustration for us of the meaning of the writer here. Here we are all, the whole race of us, exposed to the pelting of the pitiless storm, and ready to sink beneath the waters, and Jesus Christ stretches forth His strong, gentle hand and lays hold of our tremulous and feeble fingers, and keeps us up above the surges which else would overwhelm us.

Now, says my text, no man can help another unless he stand by the side of, and on the level of, that other. 'He taketh hold, not of angels, but of the seed of Abraham'; and, therefore, He must have a hand like theirs, that can grasp theirs, and which theirs can grasp. Unless the Master had Himself been standing on the heaving surges, and Himself been subjected to the beating of the storm, He could not have revived and held up the sinking disciple.

And so our Lord's bitter suffering, diffused through life and concentrated on the Cross, was no mere necessary result of His humanity, was not simply borne because, being a Teacher, He must stand to His principles whatever befell Him because of them; but it was a direct result of the purpose He had in view, that purpose being our redemption. Therefore to say, 'It behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren,' is but to declare that Christ's sufferings were no matter of physical necessity, but a matter of moral obligation. He must indeed suffer. But *why* must He? 'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren'; but why was it obligatory upon Him so to take the bitter bread that we eat, and to drink the water of tears that we drink? For one reason, and for one reason only, because He loved us and willed to save us.

So I beseech you to feel that underlying the bitter necessity which my text speaks about there is the voluntary endurance of Jesus Christ. Ah! we do not think enough about the necessity, all through His life, for a continual repetition of the great act of self-surrender of which His incarnation was the first consequence. At the beginning of His earthly career He emptied Himself, out of love to us; and step by step, and moment by moment, all through His life, there was the continual repetition of the same act. Each one of His sufferings was the direct result of His will at the moment to perfect the work which He came to do. At any instant He might have abandoned it; and that He did not was solely owing to His perennial love. For His own determination to save and succour us was the one cord that bound this sacrifice to the horns of the altar. The Man Christ, at every moment of His life, gave Himself; and as each fresh billow of sorrow rolled above His bowed and compliant head, it rolled because He still willed to save and help His fellows.

This voluntary submission of our Lord to all the sufferings which befell Him because of His determination to come to the help of His brethren ought to make us feel how that whole life of His was one pure efflux of infinite and unspeakable love; and we ought to see in it the gift which 'became' the divine mercy indeed, but which also 'behoved' the Man Jesus, to the end that all our sorrows may be comforted and all our evil taken away.

We know not, nor ever can know, by what mysterious process the Son learned obedience by the things which He suffered, nor can we understand how it was that the High Priest, who would never have become the High Priest had He not been merciful, became yet more merciful by His own experience of human sorrow. But this we know, that somehow the pity, the sympathy of Christ, was deepened by His own life; and we can feel that it is easier for men to lay hold of His sympathy when they think of His sufferings, and to be sure that because in all points He was tempted like as we are, 'He is able to succour them that are tempted.' Comfort drops but coldly from lips that have never uttered a sigh or a groan; and for our poor human hearts it is not enough to have a merciful God far off in the heavens. We need a Christ who can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ere we can come boldly to the Throne of Grace, assured of there finding grace in time of need.

III. Lastly, we have here the specification of the main purpose of our Lord's sorrows—'that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things appertaining to God to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.'

That defines more closely what He has to do, if He is to help us, and what He does do when He takes hold of the seed of Abraham. There are but two remarks that I would make on this part of my subject. The one is—let us learn what is the true nature of Christ's help. It is the help of a priest who comes to offer a sacrifice which takes away the burden and the guilt of sin from the world.

Christ's help is not merely the help of a wise Teacher. Men do not want only teaching. Their need goes far deeper than that. Christ's help is not only the help of One who declares to His fellows what God is. Men's needs go deeper than that. Christ's help is not merely the help of One who sets forth in sweet attractive colours the beauty of holiness and the charm of purity. Men's needs go deeper than that. We do not only need to know what God is, we need to have our relation to God altered. We do not only need to be told what we ought to do, we need that the past shall be cancelled, and the fatal bias and tendency towards evil within ourselves be taken away. Christ is not the Helper whose help goes down to the depths and the roots of men's necessity, unless He is Priest as well as Prophet and King. He comes to *do* something as well as to *say* something; comes to alter our relations to God, as well as to declare God's heart to us. In a word, we must say even to Christ, 'Vain is Thy help, and impotent is Thy grasp, unless Thou dost bring by Thy sufferings reconciliation for the sins of the people.'

And then, notice again how here we have Christ's priestly office extended over His whole life of suffering. The popular representations of the gospel, and the superficial grasp of it which many good people have, are accustomed to draw a broad line of demarcation between Christ's life and Christ's death, and to concentrate the whole of the sacrificial and expiatory character of His work in His death only. My text goes in the other direction. It says that all that long-drawn sorrow which ran through the whole life of Jesus Christ, whilst it culminated in His death, was His sacrifice for the sins of the world. For all sorrow, according to scriptural teaching, is the fruit of sin; and the sinless Christ, who bore the sorrows which He had not earned, in bearing them bore them away.

And though the shell of them and the outward appearance of them may be left, the inward reality and the bitterness of them is gone. It is exactly in reference to the ills of life as it is in reference to the other penalty of sin which consists in death. The outward fact continues, the inward nature is altered. For he who can say, 'Christ my Lord suffered for me,' finds that sorrows become solemn joys, and all things work together for good.

The Cross is the climax of His sacrifice, but His whole life is sacrifice and expiation, because His whole life is the life of a sinless 'Man of sorrows acquainted with grief.'

So, then, we have to look to Him, in all the meek endurance of His life, and in all the mysterious darkness of His death, not merely as the pattern of patience, as the Teacher of the sanctity of sorrow, as the first of the martyrs; but we have to look to Him, and to feel that 'the Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.'

Brother, He became like us in our sorrows that we might become like Him in His gladness. Each of us, singly, was in His mind and in His heart when He bowed Himself to the flood of sorrows, and yielded His soul to the Cross of shame. So let us stretch out our poor hands to Him who reaches His tender omnipotent one across the billows, and grasping the hands with the print of the nails, we shall find that we have exchanged portions, and that He who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows has bestowed upon us His gladness, and crowned us with the glory of the blessedness which He had with the Father before the world was

CONSIDER JESUS

'. . . **Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.'**
HEB. iii. 1.

'Consider Him that endured. . . .'—HEB. xii. 3.

THE kinds of consideration enjoined in these two exhortations are somewhat different. The former of them is expressed by a word which means fixed attention and close scrutiny. It is employed, for instance, by our Lord in His injunctions to *consider* the ravens and the lilies, and by Peter in his account of his vision of the great sheet let down from heaven, upon which, when he had fixed his eye, he *considered*. Such a fastened gaze of awakened interest and steady contemplation, the writer would have all who are partakers of the heavenly calling to direct upon Jesus.

The other exhortation refers to a specific kind of contemplation. The word might almost be rendered 'compare,' for it means to weigh one thing in relation to another. It is the contemplation of comparison which is meant. What or whom is the comparison to be drawn between? Jesus, as the Leader of the great host of the faithful, and ourselves. The main point of comparison is to be found in the difficulties of the Christian life. Think what he has borne and what you have to bear; how He bore it and where, having borne it, He is now. The Captain has sustained the whole brunt of the assault and has conquered. Think of Him and be brave, and lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees.

So, then, throwing these two injunctions together, we may regard them as impressing upon us an all-important exercise of mind and heart, without which there can be no vigorous Christian life, and which, I fear me, is woefully neglected by the average Christian to-day.

I. I ask you to think first of this gaze of the Christian soul. 'Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.'

I have said that the word implies an awakened interest, a fixed and steady gaze; and that is almost the Alpha and the Omega of the Christian life. So to live in the continual contemplation of Jesus our Pattern and our Redeemer is the secret of all Christian vitality and vigour. There must be no languid look, as between half-opened eyelids, as men look upon some object in which they have little interest, but there must be the sharpened gaze of interested expectancy, believing that in Him on whom we look there lie yet undiscovered depths, and yet undreamed-of powers, which may be communicated to us.

There must be not only the sharpened look of contemplation, but there must be a very considerable protraction of the gaze. You will never see Jesus Christ if you look at Him only by snatches for a moment, and then turn away the eye from Him, any more than a man who comes out from some brilliantly lighted and dazzling room into the darkness, as it at first appears, of the midnight heavens, can see their glories. The focus of the eye must be accommodated to the object of vision, before there can be any real sight of Him. We must sit before Him, and be content to give time to the gaze, if we are to get any good out of it. Nobody sees the beauties of a country who hurries through it in an express train. These passing glances, which are all that so many of us can spare for the Master, are of little use in revealing Him to us. You do not feel Mont Blanc unless you sit and gaze and let the fair vision soak into your souls, and you cannot understand Jesus Christ, nor see anything in Him, unless you deal with Him in like fashion.

But if there be this steady and protracted contemplation of the Lord, then, amidst all the bustle of our daily life, and the many distractions which we all have to face, there will come sudden flashes of glory and the clouds will lift often, and let us see the whole white range in its majesty and sublimity. They who know what it is to come apart into a solitary place, and rest awhile with Him, will know what it is to bear the vision with them amid all the distractions of duty and the noise of the world.

There is no way by which we can bring an unseen person to have any real influence upon our lives except by the direction of our thoughts to Him. So if you professing Christian men and women will give your thoughts and your affections and the run of your minds to everything and everybody rather than to your Master, there is no wonder that your religion is of so little use to you, and brings so little blessing or power or nobleness into your lives. The root of weakness lies in the neglect of that solemn and indispensable duty to *consider Jesus*, in patient contemplation and steadfast beholding.

Now such thoughts as these, as to the relation between the protracted gaze and a true realisation of the Master's presence, cast light upon such a question as the observance of the Sunday. I do not care to insist upon anybody keeping this day sacred for devout purposes unless he is a Christian man. I would not talk about the *obligation*, but about the *privilege*. And this I say, that unless you have a reservoir you will have empty pipes, and the water supply in your house will fail. And unless you Christian men and women use this blessed breathing time, which is given to us week after week, in order to secure that quiet, continuous contemplation of the Master, which is almost impossible for most of us amidst the rush and hurry of the week day, your religion will always be a poor thing.

I know, of course, that we may be taunted with concentrating and clotting, as it were, devout contemplations into one day in seven, and then leaving all the rest of the week void of Christ, and may be told how much better is worship diffused through all life. But I am sure that the shortest way to have no religion at all is to have it only as a diffused religion. If it is to be diffused it must first be concentrated; and no man will carry Jesus Christ with him throughout the distractions of daily life who does not know what it is to be often in the secret place of the Most High, there in the silence of fixed spirit, to 'consider Jesus Christ.'

Then let me remind you, too, that such a gaze as this is not to be attained without decisive effort. You have to cut off sidelights; just as a man will twist up a roll of paper and put it to his eye and shut out everything on either side, if he wants to see the depth of colour in a picture. So we have to look away from much if we would look unto Christ, and to be contented to be blind to a great deal that is fascinating and dazzling, if we would be clear sighted as to the things that are far off. The eye of nature must be closed if the eye of the Spirit is to be opened. And if we are to see the things that are, we must resolutely shut out the false glories of the things that only do appear. For these are perishable, and the others are real and eternal.

II. Secondly, notice here a little more particularly the object of the Christian gaze.

We may dwell briefly in this connection upon the predicates of our Lord in these two verses. According to the true reading of the first of them we are to consider *Jesus*. The first thing that is to rivet our interested and continuous contemplation is the manhood of the Lord. That name Jesus is never used in this epistle, and seldom in any part of the New Testament, without the intention of especially emphasising the humanity of Christ. It is that fair life, as it is unrolled before us in the pages of the Gospels, to which we are to look for illumination, for inspiration, for pattern and motive of service, and for all companionship in suffering and victory in warfare. 'Consider Jesus,' our Brother, the Man that has lived our life and died our death.

Note that we have to consider Him in His offices, 'the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.' This is the only instance in scripture in which the name 'Apostle' is given to our Lord. And of course it is here employed not in its technical, but in its wider and etymological sense. It means 'one who is sent.' The contrast floating in the writer's mind is apparently between Jesus and Moses; the two men both of whom, though in different fashion, were God's messengers to found a polity. Perhaps another contrast is floating in his mind, such as he has drawn out at length in the first chapter of this great epistle, between those by whom 'at sundry times and in divers manners God spake unto the fathers'; and Him 'by whom in these last days, He has, once for all, spoken unto us.' Possibly there is also a contrast between Jesus Christ the Lord of the angels, and the ministering spirits who, the previous context tells us, 'are sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation.' The name thus lifts Christ above Moses, prophets, angels, and sets Him on a pedestal, as the sole and single Revealer of the will of God to the world. The Father sanctified and sent Him into the world to be the one communicator of His perfect Name. The completeness and uniqueness of our Lord's revealing mission are expressed in that title.

The other side of what is needful for communion between God and man is expressed in the other designation, 'the High Priest.' Two things go to make complete communion—God's revelation to us and our approach to God. Christ is the Agent of both. As the subsequent context—where this idea of High Priest is more fully developed—distinctly shows, the main ideas connected with it in the writer's mind here, are intercession and sympathy. So on the one hand, as Apostle, He brings God to us; and on the other hand, as Priest, He brings us to God; and makes the golden link by which heaven and earth are united, and God tabernacles with man.

It is this Christ—not merely in His manhood, but in that manhood interpreted as being the medium of all revelation possible to the world, and as being, on the other hand, the medium of all the access that sinful men can have to God—it is this Christ whom we are to consider, not merely in the sweetness and gentleness and holiness of His lovely Manhood as recorded in the gospels, but in these mighty offices of which that Manhood was the discharge and the expression, whereby God dwells with man, and sinful men can dwell with God.

We hear a great deal in these days about Christianity being Christ and not doctrines. I say, too, Christianity is Christ, but I say it is the Christ whom these great truths proclaim to us that we have to grasp. And it is not enough to consider Jesus from a mere humanitarian point of view, nor will the consideration of Him be peace and power and holiness and life to men, unless they consider Him as the 'Apostle and High Priest of their profession.'

And again, we have to consider not only the Manhood in itself, and the offices which that Manhood discharges, but also the sorrows through which it passes. That is the force of the second of my two texts. We have to think of that Lord, who is the Leader of all the great host of the faithful, whose praises have been sung in the magnificent roll-call of the eleventh chapter; and to turn away from their lesser struggles, and paler beauties, and less complete victories. We have to think of what Jesus Christ bore, of what was laid upon Him, of how He bore it, and of how He has been exalted now to the right hand of God. Compare our difficulties and trials with His, and think that these are the pattern for us; and that we have to tread the path which He trod. Then consider how insignificant ours are in comparison with His. The whole fury of the tempest broke upon Him. It is only the tail of the storm that comes to us. The whole force of the blow was sustained unfalteringly by the steadfast Christ. It is only the blunt sword which has glanced off His strong shoulder to smite us.

'We need not seek a resting place
Where He we loved had none.'

And if we will 'consider Him that endured,' sorrow and difficulty and opposition in our Christian life will dwindle into a very little thing, and will become a token that as is the Master so is the servant.

III. Lastly, notice the blessings of this gaze.

First, let us consider Him for calmness amidst a world full of noise and confusion. We live in a time and in a city where life is very crowded; and the pressure of every day is almost more than some of us can bear. There is no relief from the continual agitation about trifles, from the hurry and bustle of this community and this country, as continuous, and in the truest point of view as aimless and insignificant as the running of ants upon an ant hill—except we live in the daily contemplation of Jesus Christ. Nothing will quiet a man like that. It gives a certain sense of remoteness, and a very positive conviction of insignificance, to what else is intrusively and obtrusively near, and fallaciously appears to be important to us. Christ's voice quiets the storm.

'On my soul
Looks Thy fair face and makes it still.'

If you would have inward calmness, without which life is busy slavery, 'consider Jesus.'

Again, that gaze will help us to a fixed confidence amidst the fluctuations of opinion. We live in a day of unrest, when the foundations are being re-investigated, and the Tree of Life can scarcely grow because men are digging it up to look at its roots. Let us try to remember that the vital centre of all is Jesus, that faith is independent of criticism, and that if we can realise His presence in our lives in these great capacities of which I have been speaking, and as the Companion of our difficulties who has trodden the same path that we have to tread, then we can look very quietly upon all the unsolved questions which are important in their place, but which, however they are answered, do not touch that central fact and our possible relation to Him. 'Consider Jesus,' and then you will be able to say, 'The things which can be shaken are removed that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' Ceremonies, churches, creeds, have all of them a human element, which will go. The divine Christ is the permanent in Christianity.

I might turn the word of my text in another direction for a moment, though it is a digression. After unbelieving theories have done their worst, I would say to the men who advocate them, 'Consider Christ.' Look at that fair vision. Where did it come from? Account for Him on any hypothesis but the truth of these four gospels. Account for His influence in the world on any hypothesis but His divine mission. You may talk till Doomsday, but you have to reckon with Jesus Christ, and to explain Him. Until you do, you have not established your negations. The reef on which so many goodly ships of unbelief have struck, and where their hulls lie broken and covered with the drifting sands of oblivion, is waiting for many a flaunting theory of to-day. 'Consider Christ.' That shatters anti-supernatural religion.

And, last of all, let us do it for diligence in service and patience in suffering. If we lay that fair image upon our hearts, it will lead to love, and love will make us toil in His service. If the sensitive plate be laid in the sunshine it will receive the image of the sun. If we consider Him, thereby, and not without such consideration, shall we become like Him.

As for our suffering and toils and difficulties, how they dwindle, and how easy patience is when we think of Him! Simon the Cyrenian had to carry the Cross after Christ, but we have only to carry a very little light one, when compared with that which He bore and which bore Him. We compare our suffering with His, and are silent. We have to think of what He deserved and we deserve, and the blush comes to our cheeks. We have to remember how He bore, and how we have borne, and we are ashamed of our fretfulness and petulance. We have to think of Him at the right hand of God. The poor fighters in the arena can lift their eyes to the place where the Emperor sits between the purple curtains, and with the flashing axes of the guard round Him, and remembering that He, throned there, was once wrestling here as we are, and that we shall be throned with Him, the thought will make us bear the blows, and run the race, and face the lions.

So, dear brother, the sure means of calmness amidst agitation, of confidence amidst the fluctuations of a restless age, of strenuous warfare, of diligent service, and patient endurance, lies here in the consideration of Christ. If we try to keep Him before our eyes life will be blessed. The secret of joy and peace on earth is the consideration of the Master by faith, and to see Him as He is will be the heaven of heaven. Here, the condition of holiness, joy, peace, power, is 'consider Jesus'; and yonder the charter of new felicities and new capacities will be, 'Behold the Lamb.' If we set Him at our right hand we shall not be moved, and shall walk in the light of His countenance on earth, and He will set us at His right hand in the heavens, where His servants shall serve Him and see His face; and His name shall be in their foreheads.

CONFIDENCE AND REJOICING OF HOPE

'. . . If we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.'—HEB. iii. 6.

Two of the favourite thoughts of this letter are included in these words. There are none of the New Testament writers who give so frequent and earnest warnings against the danger of falling away from the Christian profession as does the writer of this letter, and there are none of them who set the power and the blessedness of hope as a Christian virtue in so many attractive lights. The reason for the prominence of these two thoughts in the letter is, of course, largely the circumstances of the persons to whom it was addressed. They were Hebrew Christians, in constant danger of being drawn away from their Christian profession by the seductions of Judaism—the system from which they had passed, and which still exercised a power over them. These peculiarities, of course, have ceased to operate with regard to us, but the lessons contained in the words are of permanent value.

Note, then—

I. The characteristics of the Christian life as set forth here.

They are two, confidence and rejoicing. Now the word which is translated 'confidence' literally means frank, outspoken speech, and comes to mean, secondarily, the boldness which finds expression in such speech. It is employed here, not without some reminiscence of its original meaning, but mainly in that secondary meaning which is expressed partially, and only partially, by the word in our translation, 'confidence.' A terrified Christian is an anomaly; a timid Christian is a monster. If he is a true Christian he ought to be elevated by his Christianity high above fears of all sorts and to walk so unembarrassed and unhedged in by dread and nervous anxieties and sorrows and apprehensions that his tongue is not tied, but that he can speak out all that is in him, both to God and to man. And then the other word rendered 'rejoicing' is in the original even more emphatic than that rendering. It means 'boasting' or 'glorying,' and conveys the notion of a triumphant exultation which finds words coming to it naturally and irrepressibly, and cannot but speak out its gladness and triumph.

So these two qualities, courage and exultation, are the very key-notes and marks of Christian men and women, who live up to their privileges and understand what it is that they say they believe. What is there for a man to be afraid of if he has God at his back and heaven in front of him? Circumstances? My own weak heart? Temptations? Of course there is a wholesome fear of all these which is beneficial because it sobers us and makes us watchful, and which he is a fool who flings away? 'Be not high-minded, but fear' is only the other side of the exhortation. 'Cast not away courage,' for the fear which apprehends danger and acknowledges weakness is the usher that leads in the Confidence that creates boldness, and will not be afraid. 'What time I am afraid'—and I shall often be —'I *will* trust in Thee,' and then I may fling all fear behind my back and walk dreading nought.

Dear brethren, do we recognise it to be our *duty* to be brave? Does it ever enter into our minds that courage is part of the Christian character, and do we set ourselves to cultivate it accordingly?

But we have also to take into account the natural expression of this courageous temper which lies in the word—viz., frank outspokenness to God. There are a great many of us who never turn our hearts inside out to God. Although we call ourselves Christians our prayers do not closely fit our real feelings. We pray about the things that we think it proper to pray about: about the things which we have always been in the habit of hearing good people pray about, whether we much care to have them or not. And these little annoyances that buzz about us like mosquitoes and fret so much of our lives, we never say a word to Him about *them*. No wonder that our hollow prayers are unanswered. If we were bolder with the boldness that this text tells us is our duty, we should turn ourselves inside out to God, and say, 'Search me, O Lord; try me and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

And then, if in anything like the degree in which the facts of the case warrant all Christian people in having it, we had that courage, there would go along with it a wonderful slitting of the cords that tie our tongues to one another about our faith. What an extraordinary thing it is that so many professing Christians have no sort of compulsion to tell anybody what they are, and do not feel as if there was any necessity laid upon them to speak to others of the Saviour that they have found! Why, if the vessel is full it will run over and light *will* radiate and heat will pour itself out. If there be life in the heart the blood will be pumped through the veins. And so, if we had the courage of our profession we should all be eloquent in the right times and places and to the right persons in the praise of the Master. Courage and a triumphant exulting joy are the marks and signs of a true Christian.

Put that picture side by side with what we see in others, and with what we ourselves are and do. Many of us have got the length of thinking that it is a sign of grace to be sad and timid, and anxious and afraid to say, 'I know in whom I have believed.' And there are very few of us who have got the length of walking in the light; and 'always,' as the Apostle says, being 'confident' and bold. That unbroken courage is within reach of us all, and the hand that grasps it is the hand of unfaltering faith or confidence.

II. The foundation of this Christian courage and triumphant exultation.

Both the chief words in the text, I believe, are intended to be qualified by that expression, 'of the hope,' which follows the last of them. The confidence is the confidence 'of the hope,' and so is the 'rejoicing.' That is to say, the ground upon which there can be reared this fair structure of a Christian life all radiant and exultant with courage and triumph is the great hope which Christ sets before us, and which in Himself is brought into contact with our hearts and minds. The hope of the gospel is the basis upon which the courage and the exultation rest.

When a vessel is sunk at sea, how do they float it again? They take great *caissons*, and fasten them to the sunken hull, and pump them full of air, and their buoyancy lifts it up from the ocean bed, and brings it up into the sunshine again. Fasten your sunken and sad hearts to that great hope that floats upon the surface, and it will lift you from the depths, and bring you into the sunshine. Think of the hope which you and I profess to have! How can sorrow and dumpish dismality live in the presence of such a solid and radiant thing? What would become of our anxieties, real and deep as they are? What would become of our domestic sorrows, painful and heartrending as they are for some of us, if once we walked in the sunshine of that perpetual hope? Who cares about the rough stones, and the sharp, jagged thorns upon the road, or even much about the blood upon his naked feet, when he can see the prize hanging yonder at the winning-post? If we had that immortal crown, and that blessed peaceful hope that 'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is,' always blazing as a reality at the end of every dirty alley down which we have to go, and every dreary road along which we have to travel, how the dirt and the dreariness would be forgotten, and we should 'press toward the mark' with courage and with triumph! Think and realise to yourselves, dear friends, the contents of your hope, if you are Christian people—fellowship with Jesus Christ, the knitting of all broken ties that it will be for our joy and peace to have re-knit; the absence of all trouble that has served for discipline; the rod being broken when the child has grown to be a man; the rest and peace, the wisdom and power, the larger service and closer fellowship with the dear Lord, which are waiting certainly for every one of us. And *then*, if you can, grumble about the road, or be sad or cast down 'by reason of the greatness of the way.' 'We are saved by hope'; and if only we can make real to ourselves the facts which hope based upon Christ reveals as absolute certainties for us all, the clouds will scatter and the darkness will pass before the shining of the true Light.

III. Lastly, the effort that is needed to keep hold of the hope.

The writer uses very emphatic words. He not only speaks about *holding* it *fast*, but about doing so unto 'the end,' duplicating, as it were, the idea of effort in the grasp, and declaring that that effort is to be continuous until the time when hope is lost in fruition. Now I need not remind you—we can all remind ourselves if we think—of the many outward difficulties and hindrances that rise to the vigour and vitality of this Christian hope. These may be so dealt with by us that they become subservient to its vitality and vigour, but by reason of our weakness, they often draw us away from Christ, and become distractions instead of helps. These are perpetually at work in order to make the Christian hope less vivid, to blur the outlines and dim the colours of the picture which it paints. Our own weaknesses and worldlinesses and clinging loves that twine themselves round creatures of earth, make it hard for us to soar in devout contemplation high enough to leave the mists below and see the blue and the sun. We are all short-sighted in spiritual matters, and cannot see the things that are afar off, and the fact that they are far off makes them unreal to many of us. Therefore, unless there be constant effort directed to retain the vividness of our impression of the things that are unseen, the vulgar, intrusive, flashing brightnesses of the poor, paltry present will dim them all to our eyes.

Whilst, then, there is constant need for effort, and without it we shall certainly lose our apprehension of the unseen blessedness, to hope in which is our very life, a great deal can be done by making direct efforts to cultivate these graces of which I have been speaking, and that from which they come. Though by no means altogether so, it is very much a matter of will and resolution whether Christian people shall be brave and exultant, or whether they shall go mourning all their days, and never taking up the privileges which they possess. If you were to say every morning, 'Now I am going to try to-day to keep myself up on the high level, the overhead railway, and to travel there,' you would find it possible to do it. A man cannot make himself glad by saying, 'Now I am determined I *will* be glad,' but the moods and changing emotions of our Christian life which reposes upon facts that do not change, are very largely under our own control, and it is generally our own fault if we find our confidence oozing out at our finger-ends, and an unnameable and vague sadness, of which we scarcely know the cause, wrapping our souls like a chill November mist. One honest and vigorous resolution would rend the mist, in nine cases out of ten, and we should find that it was all the product of the undrained ditches in our own hearts.

But whilst a great deal can be done by a dead lift of resolution, and by governing our feelings and keeping a tight hand upon our emotions, far more can be done by the simpler, and in some respects easier, and certainly more effectual, way of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Person and the facts on which our hope is grounded, and from which our courage flows. That is to say, look at Jesus Christ, and keep by His side, and look into His eyes until you can see love gleaming in them, and touch His pierced hands until you can feel the power trickling from His fingers into your weakness, and rest on the assurances of His faithful word until the unseen and far-off good that He has promised is more real than the little goods close beside you. You can cultivate hope most effectually by gazing upon the things unseen, and above all, on the Person who 'is our Hope.' If only we will keep ourselves by faith, love, aspiration, communion of thought, and feeling, and desire, near to Him, He will stand beside us, and repeat to us the old word that was so frequent upon His lips, 'Fear not,' and courage will come. He will say, too, as He did in the hour of deepest sorrow, 'These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full'; and our triumphant exultation will rise like water in a reservoir when a pure river flows into it. He will say, too, 'What and where I am, there shall also My servant be'; and the living hope that comes from union with Him will make us victors over all 'that is at enmity with joy,' and all that is sad, frowning, threatening, and perilous in our present life.

So, dear brethren, we are saved by Hope, and this Hope that we have 'has passed within the veil' with our great High Priest, and there we can anchor our souls and fear not shipwreck, but ride out every storm.

HEAR HIS VOICE

. . . To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts. . . .'—Heb. iii. 7, 8.

Whose voice? The writer of the psalm from which these words are quoted meant God's. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in quoting them, means Christ's. And the unhesitating transfer, without explanation or apology, of a sacred saying of the Old Testament from God to Christ is a plain indication, especially considering that the writer was a Jew addressing Jews, of what he and they believed about Christ's divinity. His voice was God's voice, to be listened to with equal deference, and capable of bringing the same result.

'To-day'; when is to-day? The writer of the psalm meant his own epoch; the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews means his. And the unhesitating transfer of the words from one period to another rests on the principle that there is a continuous voice of God sounding through all the ages, to which each generation in turn has the privilege of listening, and the responsibility of not turning away. So we are not only permitted, but obliged, to bring down the 'to-day' to our own period, and to believe that God's voice in Christ is speaking to us individually as truly and directly as if it had never been uttered to any of the men of the past. One more remark by way of introduction. 'If ye *will* hear His voice' conveys the idea of volition. The writer of the epistle had no such intention. He did not mean to say, 'If ye *want* to hear God's voice, open your ears.' But he uses the 'if' as it is often employed in Scripture, not to express doubt, but simply to cast a statement into the form of a supposition. The meaning is really substantially equivalent to 'as often as.' Instead of 'will' we get the meaning much better when we read, with the Revised Version 'shall.' 'To-day, if ye shall hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

Now if that be the connection and the meaning of the words before us, there are three things that I want to press upon you from them. First, that Jesus Christ is speaking to you; second, that there is a danger of steeling your hearts against Him; third, that it is wise to listen to-day.

I. That Jesus Christ is speaking to you.

The readers of this letter, certainly, and its writer.

probably, never heard Jesus Christ in His earthly utterances; but as the letter says, in another place, 'He now speaketh from heaven.' The writer was sure that to these people, who had never heard a syllable of the Lord's earthly sayings, that pleading, infinitely sweet and persuasive voice was ever coming. And, as I said, his bold transference of the ancient words to his own generation involves a principle which compels us to transfer them equally unhesitatingly from the generation of apostles and early Christians to our own prosaic and commonplace times. Jesus Christ, dear friends, is speaking to every one of us, direct and straight, as He spoke to the men of those days.

He speaks to us by His recorded earthly utterances. Oh, if people would read the gospels as they ought to be read—with the conviction that there was nothing in Christ's words, local, temporary, or peculiar to the individuals to whom they were primarily addressed—how different they would be to us all! His own declaration is true about all His utterances, 'What I say unto you'—the little group gathered round Me here,—'I say unto all'—those dim and distant multitudes away out to the very ends of the earth, and down through the ages, I speak to them all.

He stands and says to me, and to thee, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Dear brother, straight to you, as if winged like an arrow from the heavens, comes this call of the Lord, 'If any man thirst'—and surely that is general enough to take us all in—'let him come unto Me and drink.'

We are putting no violence on the Lord's words by thus asserting their direct aim at every human heart. For I believe, for my part, that the love and individualising knowledge of Jesus Christ are divine; and that each of us has his own place in that loving heart; and that to each of us He spoke when He spoke unto all. So if you will rightly use the record that you have, you will hear in it Christ speaking to you.

He speaks to us by one another. I do not believe in sacerdotal authority, nor in apostolic succession, nor in any mystical sacredness attaching to any form of the preacher's office; but I do believe that the humblest and rudest of men who turns to another and says, 'Brother, Jesus Christ is thy Saviour; wilt thou not let Him save thee?' is speaking Christ's words. 'He that heareth you, heareth Me.' That is no bestowment of superhuman and magical authority on either apostles or clergy, but it is the declaration which I am trying to enforce, that every lip that is opened to proclaim the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord derives all its power and all its music, if there be any, from the inspiration of Christ Himself. The body of a violin is but meant to reverberate the sound; it is His hand that is drawn across the strings. All Christian teachers are the sounding-boards and reverberators of the music that He has made. They are but like wind instruments; the breath that is blown through them is the breath of Christ Himself. Alas! that the instrument is so often out of tune, and so poorly reproduces the infinite sweetness of the pleading tones of Him into whose lips grace was poured. But He does speak, and speaks even through such poor instruments as me.

He speaks to you deep down in that solemn voice that sometimes wakes within, and rebukes and restrains and directs. If it be true, and true it is, that the eternal Word of God is the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world, it is tenfold more true—if I may so say—that consciences like ours, which have been saturated with the more or less direct influences of Christian morality all our days, are to be taken as His voice.

And so, I beseech you, discern Christ's words, and not the mere historical record of what a dead Man once said in the past—of which criticism may make more or less havoc—but Christ's living words, springing fresh from His lips, and meant for you, in the words of the gospels. Hear His utterances, and not men's poor faltering transcription and translation of them, in the words which my fellows and I may chance to speak to you. And hear His voice in that august monitor which you carry within, to warn and to impel, a spur to all lingering good, and a check upon all rampant evil.

II. Notice the danger of steeling the heart against Him.

One would have thought that the last thing possible was that there should be a pleading God and a refusing man; that there should be a God manifest in Jesus Christ, beseeching us to accept the loftiest gifts, and that men should turn away from the beseeching. Old legends tell us how mystic music put motion into sticks and stones, and made the trees of the wood clap their hands. But men's hearts mysteriously and tragically remain stolidly deaf against that voice. It always has been so. Of old, Wisdom cried in the high places of the city; and even her queenly majesty, and gentle persuasions, and infinitely desirable gifts, gained her no hearing, and her last word was, 'I have called and ye have refused.' The Incarnate Wisdom came upon earth, not to cry nor lift up His voice in the streets, but to appeal with gentleness and searching power to men, and He had to turn away from His temple and say, 'Thou knewest not the time of Thy visitation.' All that have had the best and highest things to say to the world have had the same experience. 'If a man prophesy of wine and strong drink,' speaking words that excite and offer to gratify sense and appetite, 'he shall be the prophet of this people,' and the God-messenger has to stand and say, 'All day long have I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and a gainsaying people.' A result so uniform must have deep-lying causes.

I do not intend to enter upon these now. I wish to say a word or two rather about the 'how' than about the 'why' of this strange fact, and to warn you, dear friends, against the courses by which so many of us, and you and I in our time, no doubt, have often stopped our ears against Christ's voice.

Simple occupation with all sorts of other things will effectually do it. Great is the power of pre-occupation, magical is the power of indifference. A man can resolve not to attend to almost anything, however imperative and urgent may be its appeals to him. They used to beat drums and blow trumpets in the market-places of the towns when John Wesley and the early Methodists went into them in order to prevent the preacher's voice from being heard. And you and I know but too well—do we not?—what it is to busy ourselves with such a clamant crowd of occupations that Christ's voice gets smothered and stifled. Go into a factory and you can see that two men are talking to one another, because their lips are moving, but you cannot hear a word they say for the whir of the spindles and the clatter of the looms. And there are a great many of us that silence Jesus Christ in that fashion. We see His mouth move, and we make the more noise at our business, and so manage to harden our hearts. Do not, as soon as you go out of these doors, let the rattle of the world come in to deafen the ears of your conscience to the pleadings of your Saviour.

You can harden your hearts very effectually by neglecting to do what you know you ought to do. You can kill a plant if you persistently pick off the buds, and prevent it from flowering. You can kill your consciences in the same fashion. There is nothing which makes a man so receptive of further communications from his Lord as obedience to what He has already heard, and he who says, 'Thy servant heareth,' will never have to say in vain, 'Speak, Lord!' The converse is true. There is nothing that so hinders a man from knowing what Christ would have him do as to know that He would have him do something which He will not do. You can take the bell off the rock if you like. That will contribute to your sleeping on the voyage, and you will be troubled by no intrusive ringings until the bow is amongst the white breakers and the keel grinding on the black rocks. You can harden your hearts thus by neglecting your convictions.

You can do it by wilfully fighting them down. And I am sure that there are men and women here who know what it is to do that. Take a lump of raw cotton, and put it under sufficient pressure, and you can make it as compact as a bullet. So you can take your hearts, and by dint of determined resistance, and bringing all manner of pressure to bear upon them, you can squeeze and squeeze and squeeze till you squeeze all generous impulses and lofty thoughts and wishes to be better, and convictions of duty, clean out of them, and leave them no bigger than a walnut, and as hard as a cannon-ball. You *can* do it; do not risk it. It is possible by plunging yourselves into a deliberate course of exciting and intoxicating evil to shake off impressions so as to laugh at them. 'Take a hair of the dog that bit you' is the devil's prescription. I dare say there are people who know what it is, in order to get rid of themselves, or rather I should say of Christ speaking in themselves, to plunge more desperately into some absorbing course of evil. That is the Nemesis of all wrongdoing, that as it continues the delight of it diminishes and the necessity for it increases, to bury remembrances, to drown reflections, to get rid of self. And so as chemists can liquify oxygen you can freeze down your hearts if you will into a solid mass, impervious to anything but the retributive blow that will shatter it. Beware! 'Since ye hear His voice, harden not your hearts.'

III. Lastly, notice the wisdom of listening to-day.

Now, as I have said, the 'to-day' of my text was the epoch of the generation which the writer was addressing; and in one very blessed sense 'to-day' for each of us is the whole period of our earthly lives, during which sounding on for ever will be the pleading of Jesus Christ's voice. And so men say, 'It is never too late to mend.' Yes, perfectly true; but is not the other side as true: It is never too *soon* to mend? Whilst the 'to-day' of my text, thank God, lasts as long as the day of life, there is a very real sense in which the more ordinary meaning of it is applicable to this matter. I do not need to remind you how in all regions of life there is nothing more deleterious to character nor more fatal to success than the habit of putting off doing plain duty. In your business you are trained to promptitude. The man that does not let grass grow under his feet in ordinary matters will be half way on his journey whilst another man is thinking of getting his boots on. And promptitude is no less important—in some aspects it is even more so—in regard to listening to the voice of Jesus Christ, and obeying His commandments. So I want to plead with you, dear friends, to that effect. 'That thou doest do quickly,' if it be a right thing. 'That thou doest drop quickly,' if it be a wrong thing. But let there be no hesitation in regard of the one course or the other. As Elijah said, 'How long halt ye between two opinions?' or in the very picturesque word of the original, 'How long do you hobble along upon both knees,' resting now upon one and then upon the other. 'If the Lord be God,' then plain common sense says 'follow Him'; 'if Baal, then follow Him.'

And this is the more needful, because impressions or convictions stirred by the voice of Christ are apt to be very evanescent. They are delicate; they require prompt fixing, or they fade off the sensitive plate. They are like the images of a dream—very clear at the moment we wake, ten minutes afterwards irrecoverable. Do not trifle with what may be a fleeting inclination to eternal duty.

And they are very hard to reproduce. I am sure I am speaking to some who were once on the verge of taking Christ for their Saviour, and then something within said, 'Yet a little more sleep and a little more slumber,' and the disposition has never come back again. Felix sent for Paul many a time after the first time, and talked with him, but he never 'trembled' any more, but talked comfortably with his prisoner about the possibility of screwing a ransom out of him.

I say nothing about other reasons for prompt action, such as that every moment makes it harder for a man to turn to Jesus Christ as his Saviour. The dreadful power of habit weaves chains about him, thin at first as a spider's web, solid at last as an iron fetter. Associations that entangle, connections that impede grow with terrible rapidity. And if it is hard for you to turn to your Lord now, it will never be easier, and will certainly be harder.

And, dear friends, 'to-day'—how long is it going to last? Of course I know that all the deepest reasons for your being a Christian remain unaffected if you were going to live in the world for ever. And, of course, I know that the gospel of Jesus Christ is as good to live by as it is to die by. But, notwithstanding, common sense says that if our time here is so uncertain as we know it to be, there is no time to put off. You and I have to die, whether we find a convenient season for it or not. And perhaps we have to die before we find Felix's 'convenient season' to send for Paul or Paul's Master. So in the narrowest sense of the word, 'To-day . . . harden not your hearts.'

But I dare say some of you, and especially some of you young people, may be kept from accepting Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and serving Him, by a vague disinclination and dread to make so great a change. I beseech you, do not give a feather's weight to such considerations. If a change is right, the sooner it is made the better. The shrinking all passes when it is made, just as a bather recovers himself when once his head has been plunged beneath the water.

And some of you may be kept back because you know that there are sins that you will have to unveil if you become Christians. Well, do not let that keep you back either. Confession is healing and good and sweet to the soul, if it is needful for repentance. Sins that men have a right to know hurt as long as they are hid, and cease to hurt when they are acknowledged, like the fox beneath the Spartan boy's robe, that gnawed when it was covered up, and stopped biting when it was revealed.

So, dear friends, you hear Christ speaking to you in His Word, in His servants, in the depths of your hearts. He speaks to you of a dying Saviour, of His infinite love, of His perfect sacrifice, of a complete salvation, a cleansed heart, a blessed life, a calm death, an open heaven for each if we will take them. See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

THE LIES OF THE TEMPTRESS

'. . . The deceitfulness of sin.'—HEB. iii. 13.

THERE is a possible reference here, in this personification of Sin, as leading men away by lies, to the story of the First Temptation. There, the weapons of the Tempter were falsehoods. There was a lie about the unlawfulness of the suggested act, insinuated rather than boldly spoken, 'Hath God said, ye shall not eat?' There was a lie about its disadvantages, 'Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.' There was a lie about its ultimate consequences, 'Ye shall not surely die.' And these three falsehoods are typical of the methods which sin employs to draw us away from the path of right.

The writer of this letter does not leave us in much doubt as to what he means by sin, for he includes in it not only gross outward acts, but goes a great deal deeper, and in the verse before my text, all but defines it as being 'an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.' Whether it come in the form of gross breaches of the common laws of morality, or whether it come in more refined but not less dangerous forms, everything by which my heart goes away from God is sin ; and every such thing gains its power over me by dangling before my credulous eyes a series of falsehoods.

So then my purpose is just to try to unrip some of these lies, and see what is inside of them. The deceitfulness 'of sin' tells lies about the bait;—lies about the hook that it hides; lies about the criminality of the act to which she would draw us; and, lastly, lies about the possibilities of deliverance. Let me touch on each of these in order.

I. First, then, my text suggests to me Sin's lies about the bait.

The old story is typical, and may stand as a well-developed specimen of the whole set of evil deeds. 'When she saw that it was pleasant to the eye, and good for food, and a thing to be desired,' then the inflamed desire, perceiving the attainable object, went straight at it. And that is the history of all the evil that we do. It is either for the sake of winning a desirable object, or for the sake of avoiding some undesirable issue; we never do the wrong thing, and go away from God, except under a delusion that we shall be better and happier when we have got the desired thing than we should be without it.

Now I do not mean to say for a moment that there is not a very solid reality in the pleasurable results of a great many wrong things. If a man chooses to sin to gratify sense, he does get the sensuous enjoyment out of it. The food that is stolen will stay hunger, and be sweet upon the palate, just as much as that which is the product of honest industry. The things which tempt our desires we may get; and there will be no illusion at all about the reality and solidity of the pleasure. But there is another question to be asked. You have got the thing you wanted; have you—what then? Are you much the better for it? Are you satisfied with it? Was it as good as it looked when it was not yours? Is it as blessed now that you have stretched your hand across the flames of Hell and made it your own as it seemed when it danced there on the other side? Is not the giant painted on the canvas outside the caravan a great deal bigger than the reality inside, when you go in to look at him? Is there anything that we have got by doing wrong for it, howsoever it may have satisfied the immediate impulse in obedience to whose tyrannous requirements we were stirred up to grasp it, which is worth, in solid enjoyment, what we gave for it? Having attained the desire, do we not find that it satisfies not *us*, but only some small part of us? If I might so say, we are like those men that old stories used to tell about that had swallowed some loathly worm. We feed the foul creeping thing within us, but ourselves continue hungry. We cannot slake our thirst out of empty cups, however jewelled. Besides, sin's pleasures are false, because along with them all comes an after tang that takes the sweetness out of them. Like the prophet's book, they may be honey on the lip, but bitter as gall when swallowed. Some foul-tasting preparation of naphtha is put into spirits of wine to keep people from drinking it. The cup that sin brings to you, though it may be fiery and intoxicating, has got the nasty naphtha in it too. And you taste both the one and the other.

There is only one thing that promises less than it performs, and which can satisfy a man's soul; and that is cleaving to God. Go to Him, let nothing draw you away from Him. Let us hold by Him in love, thought, obedience; and the lies that tempt us to our destruction will have no power over us; and we shall possess joys that neither pall nor end, nor leave behind them a bitterness upon the lips. 'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' Better what Christ offers in the cup which He drank off, whereof, though the taste may be bitter at first, what remains is His own joy, perpetual and full.

II. Again, note the lies about the hook.

The old story lends itself to us as a kind of general expression to which all the falsehoods of sin may be reduced. 'Ye shall not surely die.' I suppose that if any man had clear before him at the moment of any temptation, howsoever fiery and strong, the whole sweep of the consequences that are certainly involved in his yielding to it, he would pause on the edge, and durst not do it. But sin suppresses facts; and here are a few of the barbed points which she hides. She does not tell you anything about outward consequences. I have been speaking about gross forms of sin. I wish I could believe that there is no man among my hearers to whom dehortations from them are appropriate, but I fear that in a great city like this there are never gathered as many men and women together as are here, without there being some whose sin lies in the direction of sensuous passion and animal indulgence. And I beseech such to remember the hook as well as the bait, and to think of the outward consequences in broken constitutions, poisoned blood, enfeebled frames, damaged reputations, loss of faculty position, prospects, and a thousand other things, which hang round about the path of the profligate man. Every year there come into Manchester young men who fancy they can play the game and not pay the stakes. Every month, I was going to say, there drop out of this great city, bankrupt in reputation, ruined in health, driven from positions of hopes and profit, the heart-break of their families, and a curse to themselves, young fellows that listened to such words as I am speaking to them now, and went away and said: 'We will chance it! It is exaggerated.' Yes, it would be, if I said that this was true about the whole circle of evil-doers but it is not exaggerated, if you remember that a definite percentage of all the young profligates of Manchester, year by year, go away to die, with their 'bones full of the iniquity of their youth.' Did Pleasure show you that hook when she dangled her bait before your eyes?

She suppresses the action of conscience. There is nothing more awful than the occasional swiftness and completeness of the revulsion of feeling between the moment before and the moment after. While yet escape from the temptation was possible, the thing looked so fascinating, so all-desirable; and the next moment, when the thing is done, and can never be undone, and you have got round to the back of it, it looks so hideous and threatening. Conscience lulled, or at least unheard during the hubbub of the clamant voices of the passions that yelled to be fed, lifts up her solemn voice sometimes, the moment that they are silent, gnawing the poisoned portion that is thrown to them, and speaks. Did Pleasure tell you about that hook when she dangled the bait before your eyes?

She suppresses the action of sin upon character.

We do not perceive how all our deeds, even the small and apparently transitory and incidental, are really linked together in an iron net-work of cause and effect, so as that every one of them lives on and on, in more or less perceptible and distinct effects upon our characters. You cannot do a wrong thing, 'departing from the living God,' without thereby leaving an indelible mark upon your whole spiritual and moral nature. Loftier aspirations die out of you, the incapacity for better actions is confirmed, and that awful, mysterious thing that we call 'habit' comes in to ensure that once done, twice will be probable, and twice done, thrice and innumerable times more will be almost certain. There is nothing more mystical and solemn about our lives than the way in which unthought of and trifling deeds harden themselves into habits, and dominate us, whether we will or no. And so the sin which once stood in front of us with a smile and tempted us, because it was desirable, afterwards comes behind us with a frown, and is a taskmaster with a whip. Instead of being drawn from before by anticipated delight, we are driven from behind by tyrannous habit, and commit the old sin, not because we expect pleasure, but to get away from misery. The flowery fetters become iron, and the evil once done gets to be our master, and we are held and bound in the chain of our sins. And more than that, there is the necessity for perpetual increase, heavier doses, more pungent forms of evil, in order to titillate the increasing insensitiveness of the nature. You take a tiger cub into your house when it is little; it is prettily striped, graceful in its motions, playful and affectionate; and it grows up, and when it is big, it is the master of you, if it is not the murderer of you! Do not you take the little sin into your hearts. It will grow, and its claws will grow, and its ferocity will grow.

And now all these consequences suggest the last of sin's suppressions that I would specify.

They all make a future retribution a probable thing. And that future retribution is a plain and necessary inference from any belief at all in a God and in a future life. But the tempting sin has nothing to say about that future judgment, or if it has, has only this to say: 'Ye shall not die.' Is it not strange that it is almost impossible to get many of you—reasonable, far-sighted, prudent men and women as you are, in regard to ordinary things—to look that fact fairly in the face? You are like sailors who get into the spirit-room in a ship when she is driving on the rocks, and as long as you can get the momentary indulgence, never mind about what is coming.

But you cannot 'jump the life to come.' 'Let no man deceive you with vain words; because of these things the wrath of God *is coming* upon the children of disobedience.' And so, dear brethren, let me plead with you. Weak my words are, I know, to break down the walls with which we surround ourselves. But oh, let me try to get within the defences, and plead with you not to let wishes, inclinations, and earthly tastes make you so short-sighted; but take into view *all* the consequences of your actions, and then tell me, if, regard being had to the *whole* duration of their results, anything is so wise as to love and serve and cleave to God who dwells in Christ, and in whom is our portion and our all. 'It is an evil thing and a bitter to depart from the living God.'

III. Then notice again, **the lies as to the criminality of the deed.**

Once more the old story avails us. 'Hath God said Ye shall not eat?' is the insinuated suggestion that creeps into most men's minds. I suppose that the number of us who, with clear eyes, knowing the thing at the moment that we do it to be wrong, do yet resolve that, wrong as it is, it shall be done, is comparatively few. I suppose that by far the majority simply ignore the question of right or wrong, when the question of pleasant and desirable comes to be canvassed. Before the committal—as I was saying a moment ago—we have an awful power of silencing our consciences. Just as housebreakers carry some drugged meat for the house-dogs when they intend to break into some lonely farmhouse, so we are all adepts in applying gentle phrases to our own evil, while if the same thing is done by anybody else we shall flame up in indignation, as David did when Nathan told him about the man and his one ewe lamb. Therefore it comes to this—do not you trust to instinctive utterances of inclination calling itself conscience. Remember that you can bribe conscience to say anything but that it is right to do wrong. You will get it to say anything that you teach it about what *is* wrong and what is not. And therefore you must find a better guide than conscience. You have to enlighten it and educate it and check it, and keep it wakeful and suspicious, as the price of purity.

The same set of lies about the criminality of our actions operates with still greater effect after the committal. I was speaking a moment or two ago about the sudden waking of conscience when the deed is done. But there is a worse thing than that, and that is when conscience does not wake. That is the condition, I have no doubt, of many people listening to me now. 'She wiped her mouth and said I have done no harm.' You can muffle the bell so that there will come no sound. You can sear your hand, if you once press a hot iron upon it; and you can make the cuticle of your conscience, if I may so say, just as insensitive by the same process. So then, my friend, do you take care that you do not thus darken the light that is in you, till it becomes darkness. And remember also that your knowing nothing against yourself does not prove you to be blameless. There is nothing harder than to drive home the consciousness of sinfulness. I can fancy what is passing in some, as they listen to me now. Some of you refer all that I am saying to that other man in the corner there, whom it will fit so well. Some of you are saying to yourselves, 'Oh yes, I admit it all in a general way'; but not summoning up in your mind any of the evils which cling and cleave to you individually. And some of you are trying to break the force of what I am saying by theories about responsibility, and how a man is the creature of circumstances and the like; or by pleading in arrest of judgment your better side: 'I am a respectable man. Nobody can find any fault with me. I am a good father, a good husband, an honest tradesman, a man of my word, a cultured gentleman perhaps, a student, a man abhorring gross sin, and so forth; and your words have nothing at all to do with me.' Ah! have they not? 'Departing from the living God'; that is the sin that I am talking about, brother—not going and getting drunk, stealing, wallowing in the sty of sensualism; not the mere external acts. The kernel of all sin is living to ourselves. That is what I want to lay upon all your consciences. And that is the hardest of all results for even the most earnest and pleading words to effect, in the minds of the respectable, self-complacent, gospel-hardened people that come and fill these pews.

IV. So the last word that I wish to say is in reference to the falsehoods of sin in regard to the deliverance therefrom.

These other lies, like bubbles, sometimes burst. The first of them, about the pleasures, generally bursts as soon as the thing is done. The others about the pains and the criminality often disappear when pricked by some thought of God and contact with Him. But the repertory of the deceiver is not empty yet. And she can turn her hand and bring out another set of lies, in order to retain her dominion. For the sin that said to you before you did it: 'There is no harm in it; you do not need to do it again; it is only just once and it will be done with,' says to you after you have done it, when you begin to feel that it was wrong, and try to shake off its guilt and power: 'You have done it now! You never can get away any more. The thing is past, and neither in regard to its consequences nor in regard to its power will you ever escape from it. What you have written you have written. You are mine!' And so she lays her iron claw upon the man and holds him. Some of us put that into a philosophical principle, and say that in this great system of rigid interlocking of cause and effect, the idea of forgiveness and of a new beginning of life is impossible and absurd. Some of us that cannot talk in that strain, yet know what it is to have to say: 'There is no hope! I have loved evil, and after it I must yet go.'

So sin lies to us just as she lied before. And I have to come now with the message that, of all her falsehoods none is more false and fatal than the falsehood that a sinful man cannot turn from his evil; conquer all his transgression; begin a new happy, clean life; and be sure of forgiveness from His Father in Heaven. 'Jesus Christ, the faithful and true witness,' has died that it may be possible to bring to us pure and true promises of lasting and satisfying blessedness, and to avert from each of us, if we will trust in the power of His blood, the worst and penal consequences of our transgression, and if we will trust in the power of His imparted Spirit, to make our future altogether unlike our past, and deliver us from the habit and entail of our sins. So, dear friend, these two stand before you. On one side the Sorceress with a smile on her lips, a lie on her tongue, and a knife in her sleeve. Do not go into her house. 'The dead are there; and her guests are in the depths of Hell.' On the other side stands Jesus Christ who has died to 'redeem our souls from' *her* 'deceit and violence'; and trusting in whom we may all say: 'My soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers. The snare is broken and I am escaped.'

A MOMENTOUS 'IF'

'We are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.'—HEB. iii. 14.

ONE of the great characteristics of this remarkable letter to Hebrew Christians is the frequency and earnestness of its warnings against apostasy. Over and over again we find these recurring, and in fact we may say that the whole letter is written in order to guard against that danger. The circumstances in which the persons to whom it was originally addressed found themselves largely explain that emphasis laid upon their danger of forsaking Christ. For they had to face what was perhaps the greatest trial to which faith was ever exposed, in the entire dissolution and violent extinction of the whole Jewish system which the prescription of uncounted centuries, in addition to the direct voice of God Himself, had consecrated. And they were to 'hold fast by their confidence,' though it seemed as if heaven and earth were being swept away. No wonder that there was danger of their becoming 'of those that drew back to perdition,' when such convulsions were uprooting the pillars on which their whole habits of thought and action had rested.

But, dear brethren, though our lot is cast in quieter times, the continual tendencies of our nature, and the continual stress of circumstances, make the exhortation of my text quite as important and as fitting for us. 'Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward,' must ever ring in the ears of Christ's disciples. And in these words of our text we have set forth very strongly and beautifully—

I. The necessity that is laid upon every believing heart.

'Hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.' Now what is meant by 'the beginning of our confidence'? It may mean either of two things —I am inclined to believe that it means both. The outward fact, from which our confidence took its beginning as its ground foundation, or to use learned words, the objective fact manifested to us in the gospel which tells of the incarnate dying and raised Christ, is the beginning of all true confidence. On it, and on it alone, can there be built a solid, rational assurance that can give an account of itself, and face the facts of the present and the future. And if my text be understood from that point of view, then the exhortation is to keep a firm hold of the initial truth that first of all stirred faith in our trembling hearts and breathed a tranquil assurance over our troubled consciences. Keep a firm grasp of the elementary initial truths which at first drew you to the Master.

But then, on the other hand, not excluded by this interpretation, but rather inextricably interwoven with it, is the other possible meaning of the text. 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence'—the initial act on your parts. What was it, Christian man, that first breathed a little light air of hope through the stagnant calm of indifference in your heart? That new hope was the consequence of two simple but mighty acts—repentance and trust in Jesus Christ. From these two inward dispositions there sprung, like a rainbow over a cataract, the quivering, painted bow of hope. Confidence is born of penitence and faith. 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence,' and ever reiterate the two initial acts from which it flowed. These two will be reiterated in proportion as our understandings and our hearts grasp the initial fact which, first of all, evoked them.

Now this exhortation, thus comprehensively understood, goes upon the understanding that in that elementary gospel there lies all that a man needs, and it goes also on the understanding that in these two primary acts of the Christian life, repentance and faith, there lie the seeds of all the growths and progresses which it may afterwards attain. In the first word that made these Hebrews Christians, there lay, like the leaves of the beech wrapped up in their tiny brown sheaths, in germ and miniature, and needing only sunshine and dew to open them out, all that their understandings needed for enlightenment, their wills for command, their hearts for their home—all that their hope could paint, all that their love could sigh for. The elements of this science, spoken first, are in one sense its last results. The Alpha is the Omega, and holds in itself all the alphabet—ay, and all the words and books that will be made out of the alphabet. For in that truth, 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish,' there lie the beginnings, the '*Principia*,' of all knowledge of moral and spiritual matters that a saint can learn or an angel can apprehend. There needs but development; there needs but the commentary of experience and of life in order to bring out of 'the beginning of your confidence' everything that heart and will and mind can need.

And this exhortation goes also on the other understanding that any advance—and advance there must be, for the very word 'begin' implies continuance and progress—that any advance which is to be according to the true law of the Christian system must not be away from, but deeper into that which we apprehended at first. I believe in the advance of Christian thought through the centuries. I believe in the advance of Christian knowledge as well as character in the individual. But I believe that the advance consists in getting to understand more and more of the fulness which lies in the earliest word, and that whosoever construes Christian progress in the sense of leaving behind, as beggarly elements, the truths of a Christ divine, incarnate, dying, raised again, ruling, and coming again to judge, and of a Divine Spirit imparted by that Christ—whosoever supposes that these things are elements to be left far in the rear—will find that his progress is retrogression and not advance. The beginning of the confidence must be continued, and the continuance consists in plunging ourselves more deeply into the beginning.

But, dear brethren, is it not the case that a tragical number of so-called Christians have lost the very conception, not only of progress, but of holding fast by the initial fact and the initial act? I have no doubt there are some of you professing to be Christians, members no doubt of Christian churches, who not only have not advanced one step from the place that they stood in when, as they suppose, they were first of all converted, but who are not nearly as much under the influence of God's truth in Jesus Christ as they were at that far away day, twenty, thirty, or forty years ago. They have made no advance; they have not held their ground. The beginning of their confidence has been like some of those abortive shoots that trees and shrubs are seduced to put out by the warmth of a mild October, nipped by November frost, and destined never to bear any fruit. The message comes to such with immense and convicting power: 'Hold fast the beginning of your confidence.'

No man on this side of heaven, however deep his devotion, long his career, consistent his conduct, and progressive his piety, is beyond the need for the injunction. My text says, very emphatically, 'to the end.' There have been ships wrecked at the harbour-mouth, and which have gone to pieces with the loss of all hands, on the bar. And as John Bunyan saw long ago, a door opens down to the depths, at the very gate of the Celestial City. So that we can never relax our watchfulness nor our effort to retain what we had, and to continue to practise what we did, long ago. Let me say a word about

II. The hindrances that lie in the way of obeying this exhortation.

The Christian life is not different from all other courses of conduct in regard to this characteristic, that it is apt, unnoticed either by the man himself or by onlookers, to slide off its original foundations. All great causes, begun in enthusiasm, are apt to lose their first impulses, and to be actuated at last by little more than use and wont. The deadening influence of habit comes in all our life, and in our religious life just as much as in any other department.

No doubt there are aspects in which it is seen to be a good thing that we should have the stay of a formed habit, instead of having, for each act, to find a fresh and distinguishable impulse towards good. But the evil that goes with bringing life under the sway of habit is no less real than the good. And we are all apt to drop into a complacent taking for granted that the old energy lasts; and that our religious life is bottomed on the old foundations, and that it yields to and is guided by the old motives, when all the while an entire change has come over the man, and what he used to do from fresh impulse he now does as a matter of routine. Is not that true about all of us in some parts of our lives, and about the religious life and acts of many of us? And do we not need to break up this custom, which 'lies upon us with a weight heavy as frost and deep almost as life,' and to go back to the original impulse and the initial fact which brought about the impulse, and while we fight against the evil of habit, to get all the good out of it that it can yield?

Again, of course, there must be many changes in a man's attitude to the truth, in proportion as it becomes familiar to him. Wonder goes, excitement must necessarily pass, emotion will cool. A fire crackles when it is newly lit, but when it is well burnt up it glows with a steady and unspluttering heat. And so it is by no means all loss if we leave behind us our early agitations and keep our ancient confidence. Emotion is meant to consolidate into principle, and there will be pure gain if it does. But for all that, there *is* a danger of familiarity with the truth making us indifferent to the truth, and of repeated exercise of the act of penitence or of faith making the act not less emotional—that it *must* become—but less deep and real; and then there is nothing but loss.

Further, besides these necessary changes in the accompaniments of our confidence, there is the continual operation of our own wayward and feeble natures slackening the grasp that we have of Christ, and enfeebling the practice of the initial repentance and faith. And besides these there are the continual enemies that we carry within ourselves, and the continual operation of externals, which the writer of this letter sets forth in another striking image, when he tells us that we must 'give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should drift away from them.' Yes, the current of life, legitimate duties and occupations, our daily business, our daily joys, and the good and pleasant things which God has bestowed upon us, acting upon us like the pressure of a stream upon a boat not made fast to the bank, tend to sweep us silently down the river. And if the boatman is lying asleep in the bottom of it he will find, when he awakes and opens his eyes, that he is surrounded by strange objects, and that those that he saw before he went to sleep are away far up the stream and out of sight. This unconscious, silent drift, drift, drift is sweeping away hundreds of Christian men from the firm moorings on the bank there, and unless we each make a continuous effort to retain it, we shall lose our hold of 'the beginning of our confidence.'

I need not say more than a word about the last thought suggested by the text.

III. The large, blessed result of holding fast the beginning of our confidence.

'We are made partakers of Christ,' says the writer. He uses very remarkable language on which we can but touch lightly. I may point out that the words may either mean—and it is difficult to say which of the two things they do mean—either partakers of Christ, as if all of us together sat round that sacred board, and shared the common meal which Christ presents to us, or they may mean partakers with Christ, as if we were each of us partners with Him in the possession of all that He possesses. The difference is merely one of representation, the idea presented is substantially the same in both cases. It is this: we receive Jesus Christ and all that He has and all that He is on condition of faithfully holding fast by the beginning of our confidence. Not as though we did not possess Him until the end came. The writer is not saying anything so doleful as that. The initial act gives a real possession of Jesus. Observe the language of my text. It almost sounds inconsistent with itself, inasmuch as in the first clause it says, 'We have become,' if we render the Greek accurately, 'We have become "partakers,"' as if the partaking were an accomplished fact; and then goes on as if it were one lying still in the future and contingent. That is to say, the initial, feeblest, most rudimentary, most unintelligent grasp of Christ as Saviour and Friend brings a participation in Him in proportion to its depth and its comprehension of Him. But that participation is capable of indefinite increase, and the way to get more of Christ is to reiterate the initial act and to keep a firm grasp of the first facts, 'To him that hath shall be given; and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath.'

THE REST OF FAITH

'We which have believed do enter into rest. . . .'—HEB. iv. 3.

'Do enter'—but on a hundred gravestones you will read 'He entered into rest' on such and such a day, as a synonym for 'He died.' It is strange that an expression which the writer of this Epistle takes pains to emphasise as referring to a present experience should, by common consent, in popular use, have been taken to mean a future blessing. If nominal Christians had found more frequently that their faith was strong enough to produce its natural effects, they would not have so often misunderstood our writer. He does not say, 'We, when we die, shall enter into rest,' but 'We who have believed do enter.'

It is a bold statement, and the experience of the average Christian seems to contradict it. But if the fruit of faith is repose; and if we who say we have faith are full of unrest, the best thing we can do is not to doubt the saying, but to look a little more closely whether we have fulfilled its conditions. 'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

I. So, then, the first thing to be noted here is the present rest of faith.

I say 'faith' rather than 'belief,' because I wish to emphasise the distinction between the Christian notion of faith, and the common notion of belief. The latter is merely the acceptance of a proposition as true; and that is not enough to bring rest to any soul, though it may bring rest to the understanding. It is a great pity, though one does not quite see how it could have been avoided, that so frequently in the New Testament, to popular apprehension, the depth of the meaning of that one requirement of faith is obscured because it is represented in our version by the word 'believe,' which has come to be appropriated to the mere intellectual act.

But if you will notice that the writer of this Epistle uses two other words as interchangeable with 'belief,' you will understand the depth of his meaning better. Sometimes he speaks of our 'confidence'—by which he means precisely the same thing. Sometimes he speaks of our 'obedience'—by which he means precisely the same thing. So there is an element of voluntary submission implied, and there is an element of outgoing confidence implied in the word. And when he says, 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' he does not mean 'We which acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of the world, but we who, acknowledging, let our hearts go out to Him in trust, and our wills bow down before Him in obedience and submission. We thereby do enter into rest.' Carry with you these two thoughts, then—'confidence' and 'obedience'—as indispensable elements in the New Testament conception of faith, and then you can understand the great saying of my text.

Trust brings rest, for the trust which grasps Jesus Christ, not only intellectually, but with the reliance of the whole nature upon Him to do for me that which my understanding believes that He will do—that trust brings rest because it sweeps away, as the north wind does the banded clouds on the horizon, all the deepest causes of unrest. These are our perverted relation to God, and the alienation of our hearts from Him. Brother! there is no rest deep as life which does not flow from rejoicing confidence in Christ's great sacrifice by which the innermost source of conflict and disturbance in our souls has been dealt with. Most of us are contented if there be a superficial appearance of calm, like the sunny vineyard on the slopes of a volcano, whilst in the heart of it sulphurous fires are bubbling and boiling, and will burst out some day. What is the worth of a tranquillity which only survives on condition of our ignoring the most patent and most operative fact in our lives? It is only when you shuffle God out of your consciousness, and when you wink hard so as not to see the facts of your own moral condition and sinfulness, or when you sophisticate yourself into illogical and unreasonable diminution of the magnitude and gravity of your sins, that some of you know a moment's rest. If the curtain were once drawn aside, and we were brought face to face with the realities of heaven and the realities of our own characters, all this film of apparent peace would break and burst, and we should be left to face the trouble that comes whenever a man's relation with God is, consciously to himself, perverted and wrong. But trust brings rest; rest from the gnawing of conscience, rest from the suspicion of evil consequences resulting from contact with the infinite divine righteousness, rest from all the burden of guilt, which is none the less heavy because the man appears to be unconscious of it. It is there all the same. 'We which have believed do enter into rest,' because our trust brings about the restoration of the true relation to God and the forgiveness of our sins.

Trust brings rest, because it casts all our burdens on another. Every act of reliance, though it does not deliver from responsibility, delivers from anxiety. We see this even when the object of our trust is but a poor creature like ourselves. Husbands and wives who find settled peace in one another; parents and children; patrons and protected, and a whole series of other relationships in life, are witnesses to the fact that the attitude of reliance brings the actuality of repose. A little child goes to sleep beneath its mother's eye, and is tranquil, not only because it is ignorant but because it is trustful. So if we will only get behind the shelter, the blast will not blow about us, but we shall be in what they call on the opposite side of the Tweed, in a word that is music in the ears of some of us—a 'lown place,' where we hear not the loud winds when they call. Trust is rest; even when we lean upon an arm of flesh, though that trust is often disappointed. What is the depth of the repose that comes not from trust that leans against something supposed to be a steadfast oak, that proves to be a broken reed, but against the Rock of Ages? We which have 'believed do enter into rest.'

Trust brings repose, because it effects submission. The true reason for our restlessness in this world is not that we are 'pelted by the pitiless storm' of change and sorrow. A grief accepted loses most of its power to sadden, and all its power to perturb. It is not outward calamities, but a rebellious will that troubles us. The bird beats itself against the wires of its cage, and wounds itself, whereas if it sat still in its captivity it might sing. So when we trust we submit; and submission is the mother of peace. There is no other consolation worth naming for our sorrows, except the consolation that comes from submission. When we accept them, lie still, let him strike home and kiss the rod, we shall be at rest.

Trust brings repose, because it leads to satisfied desires. We are restless because each object that we pursue yields but a partial satisfaction, and because all taken together are inadequate to our needs. There is but one Person who can fill the heart, the mind, the will, and satisfy our whole nature. No accumulation of things, be they ever so precious, even if they are the higher or more refined satisfactions of the intellect, can ever satisfy the heart. And no endless series of finite persons is sufficient for the wants of any one of the series, who, finite as he is, yet needs an infinite satisfaction. It must be a person that shall fill all the cavities and clefts of our hearts, and, filling them, gives us rest. 'My soul thirsteth for God,' though I misinterpret its thirst, and, like a hot dog upon a road, try to slake my thirst by lapping at any puddle of dirty water that I come across in my path. There is no satisfaction there. It is in God, and in God only, that we can find repose.

Some of us may have seen a weighty acknowledgment from a distinguished biologist lately deceased which strikes me as relevant to this thought. Listen to his confession: 'I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures, but am also well aware that even when all are taken together, and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation means, social position, etc., the whole concoction is but as light confectionery to a starving man. . . . It has been my lot to know not a few of the foremost men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true.' That is the testimony of a man who had tried the highest, least material forms of such a trust. And I know that there is an 'amen' to it in every heart, and I lift up opposite to all such experiences the grand summary of Christian experience: 'We which have believed do enter into rest.'

II. Note, secondly, the energy of work which accompanies the rest of faith.

There is a good deal said in the context—a difficult context, with which we are not concerned at present, about the analogy between a man's rest in God and God's own rest. That opens wonderful thoughts which I must not be tempted to pursue, with regard to the analogy between the divine and the human, and the possible assimilation, in some measure, of the experiences of the creature with those of the Creator. Can it be that, between a light kindled and burning itself away while it burns, and fire which burns and is not consumed, there is any kind of correspondence? There is, however dim the analogy may be to us. Let us take the joy and the elevation of that thought, '*My* peace I give unto you.'

But the main point for which I refer to this possible analogy is in order to remind you that the rest of God is dealt with in Scripture as being, not a cessation from work, but the accomplishment of a purpose, and satisfaction in results. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' said Jesus Christ. And modern speculation puts the same thought in a more heathenish fashion when it says 'preservation is continual creation.' Just as God rests from His creative work, not as if either needing repose or holding His hand from further operation, but as satisfied with the result; just as He rests in work and works in rest, so Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of God in eternal indisturbance and repose, in token that He has fulfilled His work on earth. But He is likewise represented as standing at the right hand of God in attitude to help His servants, and as evermore working with them in all their toils.

In like manner we shall much misconceive the repose of faith, if we do not carry with us the thought that that repose is full of strenuous toil. Faith brings rest. Yes! But the main characteristic of Christian faith is that it is an active principle, which sets all the wheels of holy life in more vigorous motion, and breathes an intenser as well as calmer and more reposeful activity into the whole man. The work of faith is quite as important as the rest of faith. It works by love, and the very repose that it brings ought to make us more strenuous in our toil. We are able to cast ourselves without anxiety about ourselves, and with no distraction of our inner nature, and no weakening of power in consequence of the consciousness of sin, or of unconscious sin—into the tasks which devolve upon us, and so to do them with our might. The river withdrawn from all divided channels is gathered into the one bed that it may flow with power, and scour before it all impurities. So the man who is delivered from restlessness is quickened for work, and even 'in his very motion there is rest.' It is possible to blend together in secret, sweet, indissoluble union these two partial antitheses, and in the midst of the most strenuous effort to have a central calm, like the eye of the storm which whirls in its wild circles round a centre-point of perfect repose. It is possible, at one and the same time, to be dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and feeding our souls with that calm that broods there, and to be up to the ears in business, and with our hands full of pressing duties. The same faith which ushers us into the quiet presence of God in the centre of the soul, pushes us into the forefront of the battle to fight, and into the world's busy workshop to labour.

So the rest which is Christian is a rest throbbing with activity; and, further, the activity which is based on faith will deepen repose, and not interrupt it. Jesus Christ distinguished between the two stages of the tranquillity which is realised by His true disciples, for He said 'Come unto Me . . . and I will give you rest'—the rest which comes by approach to Him in faith from the beginning of the approach, rest resulting from the taking away of what I have called the deepest cause of unrest. There is a second stage of the disciples' action and consequent peace; 'Take My yoke upon you . . . and ye shall *find* rest'—not 'I will *give*' this time—'ye shall find'—in the act of taking the yoke upon your necks—'rest to your souls.' The activity that ensues from faith deepens the rest of faith.

III. Lastly, to consider the future perfecting of the present rest.

In a subsequent verse the writer uses a different word from that of my text to express this idea; and it is rather unfortunate for the understanding of the progress of the thought that our version has kept the same expression in both cases. 'There remaineth therefore a *rest* to the people of God'—which follows a few verses after my text—had better have been rendered, 'There remaineth the keeping of a Sabbath to the people of God'; although probably the writer is pointing to the same facts there as in my text, yet he introduces a metaphor which conveys more clearly than the text does the idea of an epoch of rest following upon a week of toil.

So I may venture to say that the repose of faith which is experienced here, because the causes of unrest are taken away, and a new ally comes into the field, and our wills submit, and our desires are satisfied, is but the germ of that eternal Sabbath day to which we look forward. I have said that the gift spoken of here is a present thing; but that present thing bears in all its lineaments a prophecy of its own completion. And the repose of a Christian heart in the midst of life's work and worry is the best anticipation and picture, because it is the beginning, of the rest of heaven.

That future, however it may differ from this present, and how much it differs none know except those who are wrapt in its repose, is in essence the same. Yonder, as here, we become partakers of rest through faith. There, as here, it is trust that brings rest. And no change of bodily environment, no change of the relations between body and spirit, no transference of the man into new conditions and a new world will bring repose, unless there is in him a trust which grasps Jesus Christ. Faith is eternal, and is eternally the minister of rest. Heaven is the perfecting of the highest and purest moments of Christian experience.

So, Christian men and women, the more trust the more rest. And if it be so that going through this weary world you have but little confirmation of the veracity of the great saying of my text, do not fancy that it is a mistake. Look to your faith and see that it is deepened.

And let us all, dear friends, remember that not death but faith brings present repose and future perfecting. Death is not the porter that opens the gate of the kingdom. It is only the usher that brings us to the gate, and the gate is opened by Him 'who openeth and no man shutteth; and who shutteth and no man openeth.' He opens to them who have believed, and they enter in and are saved. 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

ENTRANCE INTO GOD'S REST

'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. 10. For He that is entered into His rest, He also hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.'—HEB. iv. 9, 10.

We lose much of the meaning of this passage by our superficial habit of transferring it to a future state. The ground of the mistake is in the misinterpretation of that word 'remaineth'; which is taken to point to the 'rest,' after the sorrows of this life are all done with. Of course there is such a rest; but if we take the context of the passage, we cannot but recognise this as the truth that is taught here, that faith, and not death, is the gate to participation in Christ's rest—that the rest remained over after Moses and Judaism, but came into possession under and by Christ.

For the main scope of the whole passage is the elucidation of one of the points in which the writer asserts the superiority of Christ to Moses, of Christianity to Judaism. That old system, says he, had in it for its very heart a promise of rest; but it had only a promise.

It could not give the thing that it held forth. It could not, by the nature of the system. It could not, as is manifest from this fact—that years after they had entered into possession of the land, years after the promise had been first given, the Psalmist represents the entrance into that rest as a privilege not yet realised, but waiting to be grasped by the men of his day whose hearts were softened to hear God's voice. David's words clearly, to the mind of the writer of the epistle, show that Canaan was not the promised 'rest.' David treats it as being obtained by obedience to God's word; and as not yet possessed by the people, though they had the promised land. He treats it as then, in his own 'day,' still but a promise, and a promise which would not be fulfilled to his people if they hardened their hearts. All this carries the inference that the Mosaic system did not give the 'rest' which it promised. Hence, says the author of the Hebrews, that 'rest' held forth from the beginning, gleaming before all generations of the Jewish people, but to them only a fair vision, remains unpossessed as yet, but to be possessed. God's word has been pledged. He has said that there shall be a share in His rest for His people. The ancient people did not get it. What then? Is God's promise thereby cancelled? 'They could not enter in because of unbelief,' but the unbelief of man shall not make the faith of God without effect. Therefore, as the eternal promise has been given, and they counted themselves unworthy, the divine mercy which will find some to enter therein, and will not be balked of its purposes, turns to the Gentiles; and the 'rest' provided for the Jews first, but unaccepted by them, remains for all who believe to partake.

And, still further, the writer establishes the principle that the rest promised to the Jew remains yet to be inherited by the Christian, on a second ground: '*For*,' says he, in the tenth verse of the chapter, 'for He that is entered into His rest, He also has ceased from His own works, as God did from His.' How is that a proof? It is not a proof that there is a rest for us, if you interpret it as people generally do. But it is so if you give to it what seems to be the correct interpretation—by referring it to Christ and Christ's heavenly condition. 'He that has entered into His rest,'—that is Jesus Christ, 'He has ceased from His own works'—His finished work of redemption—'as God did from His'—His finished work of creation. And there is the great proof that there is a rest for us: not only because Judaism did not bring it, but because Christ hath gone up on high. We have a great High Priest that is passed into the heavens. Christ our Lord has entered into His rest—parallel with the divine tranquillity after Creation. And seeing that He possesses it, certainly we shall possess it if only we hold fast by Him. 'There remains a rest'—proved by the fact that Christ hath gone into it, and carrying the inference, 'Let us labour, therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'

We find here, then, three main points. First, the divine rest, God's and Christ's. Secondly, this divine rest, the pattern of what our life on earth may become. And lastly, this divine rest, the prophecy of what our life in heaven shall assuredly be.

I. In the first place, then, we have here the divine rest.

'He hath ceased from His own works, as God did from His.' The writer is drawing a parallel between God's ceasing from His creative work and entering into that Sabbath rest when He saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good; and Christ's ceasing from the work of redemption, and passing into the heavens to the Sabbath of His everlasting repose.

I need not dwell at any length upon a matter which, after all speech, remains for us but very dimly intelligible—the rest of God. 'My rest'—that rest belongs necessarily to the Divine Nature. It is the deep tranquillity of a nature self-sufficing in its infinite beauty, calm in its everlasting strength, placid in its deepest joy, still in its mightiest energy; loving without passion, willing without decision or change, acting without effort; quiet, and moving everything; making all things new, and itself everlasting; creating, and knowing no diminution by the act; annihilating, and knowing no loss though the universe were barren and unpeopled. God is, God is everywhere, God is everywhere the same, God is everywhere the same infinite, God is everywhere the same infinite love and the same infinite self-sufficiency; therefore His very Being is rest. And yet that image that rises before us, statuesque, still in its placid tranquillity, is not repellent nor cold, is no dead marble likeness of life. That great ocean of the Divine Nature which knows no storm nor billow, is yet not a tideless and stagnant sea. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He loves. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He wills. God is changeless and ever tranquil, and yet He acts. Mystery of mysteries, passing all understanding! And yet He says, 'They shall enter into My rest!' Now I believe, and I hope you believe, that the rest of Christ is like the rest of God, even in respect of this Divine and Infinite Nature. 'He hath ceased from His works, as God did from His.' Jesus Christ is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' Whatsoever you can predicate of the settled tranquillity, and stable, necessary, essential repose of a divine nature, *that* you can predicate of Christ our Redeemer, of Christ the Son of God.

But still further. Besides that deep and changeless repose which thus belongs to the Divine Nature, there is the other thought which perhaps comes more markedly out in the passage before us—that of a rest which is God's tranquil ceasing from His work, because God has perfected His work. When we read in the Old Testament, that at the end of the creative act, God rested upon the Sabbath day, and blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, of course the thought that comes into view is not that of a divine nature wearied with toil and needing repose, but that of a divine nature which has fully accomplished its intent, expressed its purpose, done what it meant to do, and rests from its working because it has embodied its ideal in its work. It is the proclamation, 'This creation of Mine is all that I meant it to be—finished and perfect'; not the acknowledgment of an exhaustion of the creative energy which needs to reinvigorate its strength by repose after its mighty effort. The rest of God is the expression of the perfect divine complacency in the perfect divine work.

And, in like manner, as after that creative act there came the Sabbath, when He saw that it was all very good, and the morning stars sang together for joy;—so after the mightier new-creative act of redemption, the Christ, who is divine, ceased and held His hand, not because Bethlehem and Calvary had wearied Him, not because after pain He needed rest, not because the Cross had tasked His powers, and His suffering had strained His nature; but because all that had to be done was done, and He knew it—because redemption was completed. The Sabbath on which God rested from His work, and the new Sabbath on which Christ rose from the dead, the conqueror of death, the destruction of sin, are parallel in this, that in either case the work was done, that in either case the Doer needed no repose after His finished task. And just as God, full of all the energy of being, operated unspent after creation, needed not that rest for His refreshment, but took it as the pledge and proclamation to the universe that all was done; so Christ, unwearied and unwounded from His dreadful close and sore wrestle with sin and death, sprung from the grave to the skies, and rests—proclamation and token to the world that His work is finished, that the Cross is enough for the race for ever more, that all is complete, and man's salvation secured. As God hath ceased from His works, Christ hath ceased from His.

Still further: this divine tranquillity—inseparable from the Divine Nature, the token of the sufficiency and completeness of the divine work—is also a rest that is full of work. When Christ was telling the Jews the principles of the Sabbath day, He said to them: 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' The creative act is finished and God rests; but God, in resting, works; even as God, in working, rests. Preservation is a continued creation. The energy of the divine power is as mightily at work here now sustaining us in life, as it was when He flung forth stars and systems like sparks from a forge, and willed the universe into being. God rests, and in His rest, up to the present hour and for ever, God works. And, in like manner, Christ's work of redemption, finished upon the Cross, is perpetually going on. Christ's glorious repose is full of energy for His people. He intercedes above. He works on them, He works through them, He works for them. The rest of God, the divine tranquillity, is full of work.

There, then, is a parallel: the rest of the Father, who ceased from His work of creation, and continueth His work of preservation, is parallel with that of the Son, who ceased from His work of sacrifice, and continueth His work of intercession and of sanctifying. These two are one. 'My rest' is the rest of the Father in the Son, and of the Son in the Father. That still communion and that everlasting repose are a prophecy for our lives, brethren. The ancient promise, long repeated, has come sounding down through the echoing halls of the centuries, and rings in our ears as fresh as when first it was spoken, 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God,' they shall enter into the stillness and the secret of His tranquillity!

II. Then, in the second place, the text gives us, The rest of God and of Christ as the pattern of what our earthly life may become.

Like Christ, like God—can it be? It *can* be, with certain differences; but oh! the differences drop into insignificance when we think of the resemblances. Whether a man is capable of knowing absolute truth or not, he is capable of coming into direct and personal contact with the absolute Reality, the Truth of Truth. And whether here below we can know anything about God as He is or not, this at all events the New Testament teaches us, that we can come to be like Him—like Him in the substance of our souls; like Him—copy of His perfections; like Him—shadow and resemblance of some of His attributes. And here lies the foundation for the belief that we can 'enter into His rest.' We cannot possess that changeless tranquillity which knows no variations of purpose or of desire, but we can possess the stable repose of that fixed nature which knows one object, and one alone. We cannot possess that energy which, after all work, is fresh and unbroken; but we can possess that tranquillity which in all toil is not troubled, and after all work is ready for yet greater service. We cannot possess that unwavering fire of a divine nature which burns in love without flickering, which knows without learning, which wills without irresolution and without the act of decision; but we can come to love deeply, tranquilly, perpetually, we can come to know without questioning, without doubts, without darkness, in firm confidence of stable assurance, and so know with something like the knowledge of Him who knows things as they are; and we can come to will and resolve so strongly, so fixedly, so wisely, that there shall be no change of purpose, nor any vacillation of desire. In these ways, in shadow and copy, we can resemble even the apparently incommunicable tranquillity which, like an atmosphere that knows no tempests, belongs to and encircles the throne of God.

But, still further: faith, which is the means of entering into rest, will—if only you cherish it—make your life no unworthy resemblance of His who, triumphant above, works for us, and, working for us, rests from all His toil. Trust Christ! is the teaching here. Trust Christ! and a great benediction of tranquil repose comes down upon thy calm mind and upon thy settled heart. Trust Christ! and so thy soul will no longer be like 'the sea that cannot rest,' full of turbulent wishes, full of passionate desires that come to nothing, full of endless moanings, like the homeless ocean that is ever working and never flings up any product of its work but yeasty foam and broken weeds;—but thine heart shall become translucent and still, like some land-locked lake, where no winds rave nor tempests ruffle; and on its calm surface there shall be mirrored the clear shining of the unclouded blue, and the perpetual light of the sun that never goes down. Trust Christ! and rest is thine—rest from fear, rest from toil and trouble, rest from sorrow, rest from the tossings of thine own soul, rest from the tumults of thine own desires, rest from the stings of thine own conscience, rest from seeking to work out a righteousness of thine own. Trust Christ, cease from 'thine own works,' forsake thine own doings, and abjure and abandon thine own righteousness; and though God's throne be far above thee, and the depth of that Being be incommunicable to and uncopyable by thee, yet a divine likeness of His still, and blessed, and unbroken repose shall come down and lie—a solid and substantial thing—on thy pure and calmed spirit. 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God.' Say then, my Lord rests and my Father: I will trust Him; I will rest in the Lord, and He shall keep me in perfect peace, because my mind is stayed on Him.

III. Finally: This divine rest is not only a pattern of what our earthly life may become, but it is a prophecy of what our heavenly life shall surely be.

I have said that the immediate reference of the passage is not to a future state. But that does not exclude the reference, unless, indeed, we suppose that the Christian's life on earth and his condition in heaven are two utterly different things, possessing no feature in common. The Bible presents a directly reverse notion to that. Though it gives full weight to all the differences which characterise the two conditions, yet it says, There is a basis of likeness between the Christian life on earth and the Christian life in heaven, so great as that the blessings which are predicated of the one belong to the other. Only here they are in blossom, sickly often, putting out very feeble shoots and tendrils; and yonder transplanted into their right soil, and in their native air with heaven's sun upon them, they burst into richer beauty, and bring forth fruits of immortal life. Heaven is the earthly life of a believer glorified and perfected. If here we by faith enter into the beginning of rest, yonder through death with faith, we shall enter into the perfection of it.

We cannot speak wisely of that future when we speak definitely of it. All that I suggest now as taught us by this passage is, that heaven will be for us, rest in work and work that is full of rest. Our Lord's heaven is not an idle heaven. Christ is gone up on high, having completed His work on earth, that He may carry on His work in heaven; and after the pattern and likeness of His glory and of His repose, shall be the repose and glory of the children that are with Him. He rests from His labours, and His works do follow Him. He sitteth at the right hand of God 'expecting'—waiting patiently and in the confidence of assured triumph, 'till His enemies become His footstool.' But yet the dying martyr saw his Lord standing, not sitting, ready to help, and bending over him to welcome; and though He has ascended, and left the work of spreading the gospel to be done on earth, 'the Lord works with us' from His throne, nor is untouched by our troubles, nor idle in our toils. All the rest of that divine tranquillity, is rest in rapid, vigorous, perpetual motion. Ay, it is just as it is with physical things: the looker-on sees the swiftest motion as the most perfect rest. The wheel revolves so fast that the eye cannot discern its movements. The cataract foaming down from the hillside, when seen from half-way across the lake, seems to stand a silent, still, icy pillar. The divine work, because it is *such* work, is rest—tranquil in its energy, quiet in its intensity; because so mighty, therefore so still! That is God's heaven, Christ's heaven.

The heaven of all spiritual natures is not idleness. Man's delight is activity. The loving heart's delight is obedience. The saved heart's delight is grateful service. The joys of heaven are not the joys of passive contemplation, of dreamy remembrance, of perfect repose; but they are described thus, 'They rest not day nor night.' 'His servants serve Him, and see His face.'

Yes, my brother, heaven is perfect '*rest.*' God be thanked for all the depth of unspeakable sweetness which lies in that one little word, to the ears of all the weary and the heavy laden. God be thanked, that the calm clouds which gather round the western setting sun, and stretch their unmoving loveliness in perfect repose, and are bathed through and through with unflashing and tranquil light, seem to us in our busy lives and in our hot strife like blessed prophets of our state when we, too, shall lie cradled near the everlasting, unsetting Sun, and drink in, in still beauty of perpetual contemplation, all the glory of His face, nor know any more wind and tempest, rain and change. Rest in heaven—rest in God! Yes, but work in rest! Ah, that our hearts should grow up into an energy of love of which we know nothing here, and that our hands should be swift to do service, beyond all that could be rendered on earth,—that, never wearying, we should for ever be honoured by having work that never becomes toil nor needs repose; that, ever resting, we should ever be blessed by doing service which is the expression of our loving hearts, and the offering of our grateful and greatened spirits, joyful to us and acceptable to God,—that is the true conception of 'the rest that remaineth for the people of God.' Heaven is waiting for us—like God's, like Christ's—still in all its work, active in all its repose. See to it, my friend, that your life be calm because your soul is fixed, trusting in Jesus, who alone gives rest here to the heavy laden. Then your death will be but the passing from one degree of tranquillity to another, and the calm face of the corpse, whence all the lines of sorrow and care have faded utterly away, will be but a poor emblem of the perfect stillness into which the spirit has gone. Faith is the gate to partaking in the rest of God on earth. Death with faith is the gate of entrance into the rest of God in heaven.

MAN'S SHARE IN GOD'S REST

'Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.'—Heb. iv. 11.

With this simple, practical exhortation, the writer closes one of the most profound and intricate portions of this Epistle. He has been dealing with two Old Testament passages, one of them, the statement in Genesis that God rested after His creative work; the other, the oath sworn in wrath that Israel should not enter into God's rest. Combining these two, he draws from them the inferences that there is a rest of God which He enjoys, and of which He has promised to man a share; that the generation to whom the participation therein was first promised, and as a symbol of that participation, the outward possession of the land, fell by unbelief, and died in the wilderness; that the unclaimed promise continued to subsequent generations and continues to this day. All the glories of it, all the terrors of exclusion, the barriers that shut out, the conditions of entrance, the stringent motives to earnestness, are one in all generations. Surface forms may alter; the fundamentals of the religious life, in the promise of God, and the ways by which men may win or miss it, are unchangeable.

And so the reiterated appeal comes to us with its primeval freshness, saying, after so long a time, '*To-day*, if ye will hear His voice, harden not *your* hearts.'

We have, then, in the words before us, these three things—the rest of God; the barriers against, and the conditions of, entrance; and the labour to secure the entrance.

I. Note then, first, the rest of God.

Now it is quite possible that the Psalmist, in the passage on which our text foots itself, may have meant by 'My rest' nothing more than repose in the land, which rest was God's since He was the giver of it. But it seems more probable that something of the same idea was floating in his mind, which the writer of this Epistle states so expressly and strongly—viz., that far beyond that outward possession there is the repose of the divine nature in which, marvellous as it may seem, it is possible for a man, in some real fashion, to participate.

What, then, is the rest of God? The 'rest' which Genesis speaks about was, of course, not repose that recruited exhausted strength, but the cessation of work because the work was complete, the repose of satisfaction in what we should call an accomplished ideal.

And, further, in that august conception of the rest of God is included, not only the completion of all His purpose, and the full correspondence of effect with cause, but likewise the indisturbance and inward harmony of that infinite nature whereof all the parts co-operant to an end move in a motion which is rest.

And, further, the rest of God is compatible with, and, indeed, but another form of, unceasing activity. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' said the Master; though the works were, in one sense, finished from the foundation of the world.

Now can we dare to dream that in any fashion that solemn, divine repose and tranquillity of perfection can be reproduced in us? Yes! The dewdrop is a sphere, as truly as the sun; the rainbow in the smallest drop of rain has all the prismatic colours blended in the same harmony as when the great iris strides across the sky. And if man be made in the image of God, man perfected shall be deiform, even in the matter of his apparently incommunicable repose. For they who are exalted to that final future participation in His life will have to look back, too, upon work which, stained as it has been in the doing, yet, in its being accepted upon the altar on which it was humbly laid, has been sanctified and greatened, and will be an element in their joy in the days that are to come. 'They rest from their labours, and their works do follow them'—not for accusation, nor to read to them bitter memories of incompleteness, but rather that they may contribute to the deep repose and rest of the heavens. In a modified form, but yet in reality, the rest of God may be possessed even by the imperfect workers here upon earth.

And, in like manner, that other aspect of the divine repose, in the tranquillity of a perfectly harmonious nature, is altogether, and without restriction, capable of being reproduced, and certain in the future to be reproduced in all them that love and trust Him, when the whole being shall be settled and centred upon Him, and will and desires and duty and conscience shall no more conflict. 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' is a prayer even for earth. It will be fully answered in heaven, and the souls made one through all their parts shall rest in God, and shall rest like God.

And further, the human participation in that divine repose will have, like its pattern, the blending without disturbance of rest with motion. The highest activity is the intensest repose. Just as a light, whirled with sufficient rapidity, will seem to make a still circle; just as the faster a wheel moves the more moveless it seems to stand; just as the rapidity of the earth's flight through space, and the universality with which all the parts of it participate in the flight, produce the sensation of absolute immobility. It is not motion, but effort and friction, that break repose; and when there is neither the one nor the other, there will be no contrariety between activity and rest; but we shall enjoy at once the delights of both without the wear and tear and disturbance of the one or the languor of the other.

This participation by man in the rest of God, which has its culmination in the future, has its germ in the present. For I suppose that none of the higher blessings which attach to the perfect state of man, as revealed in Scripture, do so belong to that state as that their beginnings are not realised here. All the great promises of Scripture, except those which may point to purely physical conditions, begin to be fulfilled here in the earnest of the inheritance. And so, though toil be our lot, and work against the grain, beyond the strength, and for merely external objects of passing necessity, may be our task here, and the disturbance of rest through sorrows and cares is the experience of all, yet even here, as this Epistle has it, 'we who have believed do enter into rest.' The Canaan of the Jew is treated by the writer of this Epistle as having only been a symbol and outward pledge of the deeper repose to which the first receivers of the promise were being trained, if they had been faithful, to look forward and aspire; and the heaven that awaits us, in so far as it is a place and external condition, is in like manner but a symbol and making manifest to sense of the spiritual verity of union with God and satisfaction and rest in Him.

II. So look, secondly, at the barriers against, and the conditions of, entrance into that rest.

My text says, 'Lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.' Now it is to be observed that in this section, of which this is the concluding hortatory portion, there is a double reason given for the failure of that generation to whom the promise was addressed to appropriate it to themselves; and that double representation has been unfortunately obscured in our Authorised Version by a uniform rendering of two different words. Sometimes, as here in my text, we find that the word translated 'unbelief' really means *disobedience*; and sometimes we find that it is correctly translated by the former term. For instance, in the earlier portions of the section, we find a warning against 'an evil heart of unbelief.' The word there is correctly translated, Then we find again, 'To whom He sware in His wrath that they should not enter into His rest; but unto them that believed not,' where the word ought rather to be 'them that were disobedient.' And in the subsequent verse we find the 'unbelief' again mentioned. So there are not one but two things stated by the writer as the barriers to entrance—unbelief and its consequence and manifestation as well as root, disobedience.

And the converse, of course, follows. If the barrier be a shut door of unbelief, plated with disobedience, like iron upon an oak portal, then the condition of entrance is faith, with its consequence of submission of will, and obedience of life.

Notice the important lessons that are given by this alternation of the two ideas of faith and unbelief, obedience and disobedience. Disobedience is the root of unbelief. Unbelief is the mother of further disobedience. Faith is submission, voluntary, within a man's own power. If it be not exercised the true cause lies deeper than all intellectual ones, lies in the moral aversion of his will and in the pride of independence, which says, 'Who is Lord over us?' Why should we have to depend upon Jesus Christ? And as faith is obedience and submission, so faith breeds obedience, and unbelief leads on to higher-handed rebellion. The two interlock each other, foul mother and fouler child; and with dreadful reciprocity of influence the less a man trusts the more he disobeys; the more he disobeys the less he trusts.

But, then, further, note the respective influence of these two—faith and unbelief; and the other couple, obedience and disobedience, in securing entrance to the rest. Now I desire to bring into connection with this duality of representation, which, as I have said, pervades this section of our letter, our Lord's blessed words, 'Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, and ye shall find rest.' There again, we have the double source of rest, and by implication the double source of unrest. For the rest which is given, and the rest which is found, that which ensues from coming to Christ, and that which ensues from taking His yoke upon us and learning of Him, are not the same. But the one is the rest of faith, and the other is the rest of obedience.

So, then, consider the repose that ensues from faith, the unrest that dogs unbelief. When a man comes to Christ, then, because Christ enters into him, he enters into rest. There follow the calming of the conscience and reconciliation with God, there is the beginning of the harmonising of the whole nature in one supreme and satisfying love and devotion. These things still the storm and make the incipient Christian life in a true fashion, though in a small measure, participant of the rest of God.

People say that it is arbitrary to connect salvation with faith, and talk to us about the 'injustice' of men being saved and damned because of their creeds. We are not saved for our faith, nor condemned for our unbelief, but we are saved *in* our faith, and condemned *in* our unbelief. Suppose a man did not believe that prussic acid was a poison, and took a spoonful of it and died. You might say that his opinion killed him, but that would only be a shorthand way of saying that his opinion led him to take the thing that did kill him. Suppose a man believes that a medicine will cure him, and takes it, and gets well. Is it the drug or his opinion that cures him? If a certain mental state tends to produce certain emotions, you cannot have the emotions if you will not have the state. Suppose you do not rely upon the promised friendship and help of some one, you cannot have the joy of confidence or the gifts that you do not believe in and do not care for. And so faith is no arbitrary appointment, but the necessary condition, the only condition possible, in the nature of things, by which a man can enter into the rest of God. If we will not let Christ heal our wounds, they must keep on bleeding; if we will not let Him soothe our conscience, it must keep on pricking; if we will not have Him to bring us nigh, we must continue far off; if we will not open the door of our hearts to let Him in, He must stop without. Faith is the condition of entrance; unbelief bars the door of heaven against us, because it bars the door of our hearts against Him who is heaven.

And then, in like manner, obedience and disobedience are respectively conditions of coming into contact or remaining untouched by the powers which give repose. Submission is tranquillity. What disturbs us in this world is neither work nor worry, but wills unconformed to our work, and unsubmissive to our destiny. When we can say, 'Thy will be done,' then some faint beginnings of peace steal over our souls, and birds of calm sit brooding even on the yet heaving deep. The ox that kicks against the pricks only makes its hocks bloody. The ox that bows its thick neck to the yoke, and willingly pulls at the burden, has a quiet life. The bird that dashes itself against the wires of its cage bruises its wings and puts its little self into a flutter. When it is content with its limits, its song comes back. Obedience is repose; disobedience is disturbance, and they who trust and submit have entered into rest.

III. Now, lastly, a word about the discipline to secure the entrance.

That is a singular paradox and bringing together of opposing ideas, is it not, Let us labour to enter into rest? The paradox is not so strong in the Greek as here, but it still is there. For the word translated 'labour' carries with it the two ideas of earnestness and of diligence, and this is the condition on which alone we can secure the entrance, either into the full heaven above, or into the incipient heaven here.

But note, if we distinctly understand what sort of toil it is that is required to secure it, that settles the nature of the diligence. The main effort of every Christian life, in view of the possibilities of repose that are open to it here and now, and yonder in their perfection, ought to be directed to this one point of deepening and strengthening faith and its consequent obedience.

You can cultivate your faith, it is within your own power. You can make it strong or weak, operative through your life, or only partially, by fits and starts. And what is required is that Christian people should make a business of their godliness, and give themselves to it as carefully and as consciously and as constantly as they give themselves to their daily pursuits. The men that are diligent in the Christian life, who exercise that commonplace, prosaic, pedestrian, homely virtue of earnest effort, are sure to succeed; and there is no other way to succeed. You cannot go to heaven in silver slippers. But although it be true that heaven is a gift, and that the bread of God is given to us by His Son, the old commandment remains unrepealed, and has as direct and stringent reference to the inward

Christian life as to the outward. 'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread,' though it be at the same time bread that is given thee. And how are we to cultivate our faith? By contemplating the great object which kindles it. Do you do that? By resolving, with fixed and reiterated determinations, that we will exercise it. 'I will trust and not be afraid.' Do you do that? By averting our eyes from the distracting competitors for our interest and attention, in so far as these might enfeeble our confidence. Do you do that? Diligence; that is the secret—a diligence which focuses our powers, and binds our vagrant wills into one strong, solid mass, and delivers us from languor and indolence, and stirs us up to seek the increase of faith as well as of hope and charity.

Then, too, obedience is to be cultivated. How do you cultivate obedience? By obeying—by contemplating the great motives that should sway and melt, and sweetly subdue the will, which are all shrined in that one saying. 'Ye are not your own; ye are bought with a price,' and by rigidly confining our desires and wishes within the limits of God's appointment, and religiously referring all things to His supreme will. If thus we do, we shall enter into rest.

So, dear friends, the path is a plain enough one. We all know it. The goal is a clear enough one. I suppose we all believe it. What is wanted is feet that shall run with perseverance the race that is set before us. The word of my text which is translated 'labour,' is found in this Epistle in another connection, where the writer desires that we should show 'the same *diligence* to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' It is also caught up by one of the other apostles, who says to us, 'Giving all *diligence*, add to your faith' the manifold virtues of a practical obedience, and so 'the entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.' A more authoritative voice points us to the same strenuous effort, for our Lord has said, 'Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you,' and when the listeners asked Him what works He would have them do, He answered, bringing all down to one, which being done would produce all others, 'This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.'

So if we labour to increase our faith, and its fruits of obedience, with a diligence inspired by our earnestness which is kindled by the thought of the sublimity of the reward, and the perils that seek to rob us of our crown, then, even in the wilderness, we shall enter into the Promised Land, and though the busy week of care and toil, of changefulness and sorrow, may disturb the surface of our souls, we shall have an inner sanctuary, where we can shut our doors about us and enjoy a foretaste of the Sabbath-keeping of the heavens, and be wrapped in the stillness of the rest of God.

THE THRONE OF GRACE

'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'—HEB. iv. 16.

IN the context are three great exhortations which bear a very remarkable and distinct relation to each other: 'Let us labour to enter into rest'; 'Let us hold fast our profession'; 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace.'

It is a hard thing to labour to enter into rest. How is it to be done? The second exhortation helps us to answer, 'Let us hold fast our profession,' which being translated into other words, is this: our true way of labour is to cling in faith to Him whom we acknowledge; but knowing the weakness of our own hearts, and how they waywardly fluctuate and pass away from the one confidence and happiest trust, it is with profound wisdom that the ultimate injunction is held out for the foundation of all—'Let us come to the throne of grace.' There we get the strength that will enable our slack and benumbed fingers to grasp again the thing we hold. There we shall get that fresh grip of Christ which will quicken us for the labour of entering into rest. And so this portion of exhortation interposed between the doctrinal and theological parts of this letter is addressed to every one in the Christian profession. I ask you, then, to look at this exhortation, which covers the whole ground of Christian duty and strength.

Now, first, here is a very remarkable and beautiful expression—'the throne of grace.' Grace, of course, as I do not need to explain, is the New Testament word for the undeserved favour and loving regard of God to man considered as weak, sinful, and unworthy; it is love which has its own motive, apart from any regard to worthiness in the object upon which it falls. Grace is its own real impulse and motive, and grace is set in Scripture as the opposite of desert; it is of grace, not of works, and so forth. It is set as the antagonist of sin and unrighteousness and all evil, and so runs up to the idea that it expresses the unmerited, self-originated, loving regard of God to us poor miserable creatures, who, if dealt with on the ground of right and retribution, would receive something very different indeed. But my text says the throne of grace is the throne of God. I wonder if it is too picturesque to take that word grace here as a kind of synonym of God? Think of the figure that was in the writer's mind, as being that grace itself was the occupant of the throne, that there she sits, regal, sovereign, enthroned in the heart of the universe, queen of all things, and giving from her full and generous hand to every creature all that which the creature requires. And then if we take the more prosaic notion—which perhaps is the safer one—and think that the metaphor is not that grace is queen and sovereign, but only that the throne is based and established, as it were, in grace, out of which this undeserved love flows in broad, full streams. Even if we take the metaphor thus, we come to the same thought, that whatever else there may be in the divine nature, the ruling sovereign element in Deity is unmerited love and mercy and kindly regard to us poor, ignorant, sinful creatures, which keeps pouring itself out over all the world. God is King, and the kingly thing in God is infinite grace.

Then we can scarcely but bring into connection with this grand idea the other phases which the Old Testament gives to the same thought. Read such words as these:—'Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne'—'God sitteth on the throne of His holiness'—'The throne of Thy glory.' Yes, the throne of justice and of judgment. White and sparkling—cold and repellent. The throne of glory—flashing and dazzling, coruscating and blinding, glittering and shimmering—ready to smite the diseased eye. The throne of Thy holiness. Yes, lofty, far up there, towering above us in its pure completeness, and we poor creatures, being ourselves blinded and dazed, and far away from Him, down amidst the lowlands and materialities, and all that majesty in the heavens—the justice and judgment, the holiness and glory—all that is only the envelope and wrappage, the living centre and heart of it is a pure, lambent glow of tenderness, and the throne is truly the throne of grace. The 'throne' gives us all ideas of majesty, sovereignty, dominion, infinitude, greatness. The thought that it is 'the throne of grace' sheathes all these in the softest, tenderest, most blessed folds of love—unmerited, free, spontaneous—simply because He is God, and not on account of any goodness in us. Bearing in mind this great conception of true love, ruling, dominant, the sovereign element in the divine nature, let us ask, How do we reach it? Are we warranted in believing it? Read the verses that come before: 'For we have not a High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.' Turn that doctrinal statement into a statement of principle and it just comes to this: that our certitude that God's throne is a throne of love and grace, is all involved in, dependent upon, and built upon, the work of Christ, the High Priest of our profession. That is to say, not 'thank God' that His work makes God's throne a throne of grace —that is not the teaching of the Scripture—but that He, as High Priest, and, therefore, as the revealer to us of God as He is, shows us in His life and death, in the gentleness of His character, in the tenderness of His compassion, in the depth of His sympathy on earth, in the tenderness that touched the little children in their innocence and the harlots in their filth, and in the death He died upon the Cross for the sake of the world—

the very heart of God is cut open, as it were, and the two halves fall apart as when we cut some rich fruit to lay bare the inmost pulp. God is manifested to us, God declares Himself to us, in the sympathy of the humanity, in the life, in the death upon the Cross; and the Priest, in His sacrifice, and by His sacrifice, shows us that between the cherubim throned above the mercy-seat shimmers the Shekinah of power, with its white centre of love and peace. And then, on the other side, that same great thought of the priesthood of Christ influences this conception of the throne of God in another fashion still; for, as it seems to me, there is no understanding of the depth and meaning of the work of Jesus Christ, our Lord, unless we heartily accept this, that His great sacrifice for us, in which mainly He is the Priest of our profession, is the means and channel and medium and condition through which all the love of God expresses itself to the world, and has communicated to sinful man all His goodness and all His pity and His tenderness, supplying all our necessities, and is all things to us through Christ our Lord. Seen through Him the throne is white with tenderness; flowing through Him from the throne proceeds the river of the water of life, and so, in both ways, the throne of grace is such by reason of the priesthood of Christ.

Look for a moment, in the next place, at the temper and disposition with which we come to this throne. 'Let us come boldly.' Now boldly is a somewhat incongruous word; it neither conveys the original, nor does it correspond to our sense of propriety. The thought would be far more beautiful and far more naturally represented by a more literal translation—'Let us come with frank confidence' to the throne of grace. The word literally means, if we go to the etymology of it, speaking everything. You can easily understand how naturally that becomes an expression for the unembarrassed, unrestrained full out-pouring of a heart. You cannot pour out your heart in the fullest confidence to a person you do not respect, but if you get with some one you entirely trust, how swiftly the words flow, and how very easy it is to tell out the whole heart. Just so with this great word of the writer of this Epistle, descriptive of the temper and disposition with which men are to go to God—with confidence, full, cheerful, and unembarrassed, and which expresses itself in full trust, exactly as one of the old Psalms says—'Ye people, pour out your heart before Him.' Yes, let it all flow out, just as you would do to husband or wife, or lover, or friend, or the chosen companion to whom we can tell everything. Ah, but there is no such person—there is nobody, not a soul, could stand the turning inside out of a man! There is no one able to do it to another, even supposing the other could bear it! But my text says 'come,' and is so gentle in its love, so strong in its grace, sweetly wooing us to the freest and frankest outpourings of all our hearts before the throne. Let us then come with confidence, because Jesus' work as our High Priest is in the writer's mind. You remember the vision in the Revelation where the seer beholds the angel coming with a censer, and he takes incense from off the golden altar, and he goes on to say, that this much incense was offered in the censer with prayers of saints. That is a picturesque and graphic representation of this same idea; my poor cry, the devotions of my trembling, unfaithful heart, the halting, limping approach of my sluggish spirit, these go along with, and are offered through, that

Great High Priest. 'Let the much incense of Thy prayer On my behalf ascend.' Truly we have a loving High Priest; let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace. Let us not use as a mere empty form those words 'for Christ's sake,' but let us remember that these words do hold the very secret of all acceptable approach to God, and that 'no man cometh to the Father but by Me.' There is reason enough, God knows, in your heart and mine, and in our poor, miserable, wretched, conventional, formal chatterings called prayers, for diffidence and distrust. Well, then, let us fully look that fact in the face, entertain untremblingly the fullest consciousness of the insufficiency and unworthiness of all we do, and all we are, and all we feel, and all we seek, and then wrenching ourselves away as it were from the contemplation of our own selves, which only land us in diffidence and despair, let us turn to Him, that we may have boldness and confidence in our access to the feet of Him who is our Great High Priest, passed into the heavens, and who now sits on the 'throne of grace.'

And now, lastly, a word about the issue and result of this confidence of access to the throne of grace, the throne of spontaneous love. 'That we may obtain mercy,' says the writer, 'and find grace to help in time of need.' It is noteworthy, I think, to consider that the writer here is evidently thinking, not about a communion with God which is not prayer, but a communion with God which, on our side, is the lifting up of an empty hand, and on His side the bestowing a large, full gift. There is no fellowship with God possible on the footing of what people call 'disinterested communion.' No, we have always to go to Him to get something from Him. The question is, What do we expect to get? My text tells us, not the temporal blessings, not the answers to foolish desires, not the taking away of thorns in the flesh, but mercy and grace to help—inward and spiritual blessings. But what are these? Well, I don't know whether it is too nice or too microscopic criticism to say that I seem to see a difference between obtaining mercy and finding grace. I take it grace is used in what I call its secondary sense, not meaning so much the love of God unmerited, but rather signifying the consequences of that love in the gifts bestowed upon us, and you know that is a usage of the word common in the New Testament, thus making the word into a plural, 'graces'—the manifold gifts that love bestows upon us. So that, I take it, this word is here used in the secondary sense, and if that be so, we may shape a difference between the two phrases, 'obtaining mercy' and 'finding grace.'

I do not think I can put that better than by using a metaphor. The one expresses the heart of God, the other expresses the hand of God. We may obtain mercy as a suppliant coming boldly, confidently, frankly, with faith in the Great High Priest, to the throne of grace. There we get the full heart of God. I stand before Him in my filth, in my weakness, with conscience gnawing at me in the sense of many infirmities, many a sin and shortcoming and omission, and on the throne, if I may so say, is a shoot of tender love from God's heart to me, and I get for all my weakness and sin pity and pardon, and find mercy of the Lord in that day. And then in getting the full heart of God, with all its divine abundance and pardoning grace and tender, gracious pity, I get, of course, the full hand of God to obtain mercy, and find grace, the bestowment of the needful blessings, the obtaining of grace in time of need, the right grace. No blunders in the equipment with which He supplies us. He does not give me the parcel that was meant for you; there is no error in the delivery. He does not send His soldiers to the North Pole equipped for warfare in Africa. He does not give this man a blessing that the man's circumstances would not require. No, no; blessed be God, He cannot err. We fall back upon the words that precede my text, 'And there is no creature concealed from His sight, for all things are naked, and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give an account.' That may be, and is terrible, unless we take it along with the other word, 'We have not a High Priest who cannot sympathise with our weakness.' We see a divine omniscience shining upon us through the merits of the great High Priest, full of light and hope, and because all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him who is our High Priest; therefore the right grace will be most surely given to me to help me in time of need, or, as the words may perhaps be more vigorously and correctly translated, find grace for timely aid, grace punctually and precisely at the very nick of time, at the very exact time determined by heaven's chronometer, not by ours. It will not come as quickly as impatience might think it ought, it will not come so soon as to prevent an agony of prayer, it will not come in time enough for our impatience, for murmuring, for presumptuous desires; but it will come in time to do all that is needed. Ah, and it will come before Peter has gone below the water, though not until Peter has felt the cold waves rise to his knees, and has cried out, 'Lord, save me, I perish.' 'Master, he whom Thou lovest is sick,' and He abode still two days in the same place where He was, and when He came, 'Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died.' 'Said I not unto thee, that if thou didst believe thou shouldest see the glory of God.' 'God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved, the Lord shall help her, and that right early.' You remember the narrative of that great final battle on the plains of Waterloo. For long weary days brave men died by the thousands—the afternoon of the last day was wearing rapidly away, the thin red living line getting thinner and thinner, the squares smaller and smaller at each returning charge—but at last, just before the daylight faded, just before endurance could do no more, there comes old Blücher at last and gives the order, and the whole line bore down upon the enemy and scattered them. Ah, help came at the right time, not so soon but that the courage of our brave soldiers had been tested, but before despair had settled upon the ranks, and in time for a great and perfect victory. Oh, my friends, 'Let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace for every time of need.'

> 'Through waves and clouds and storms
> He gently clears thy way;
> Wait thou His time—thy darkest night
> Shall end in brightest day.'

GETHSEMANE

'Who in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared.'—HEB. v. 7.

WE may take these great and solemn words as a commentary on the gospel narrative of Gethsemane. It is remarkable that there should be here preserved a detail of that agony which is not found in our Gospels. The strong crying and tears find no record in our evangelists, and so it would appear as though the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews was not altogether dependent upon them for his knowledge of Christ's life. In any case here we have independent witness to the story of Christ's passion, and a very instructive hint as to the widespread and familiar knowledge of the story of our Lord's suffering, which existed at the very early date of this Epistle in the churches, so that it could be referred to in this far-off allusive way with the certainty that hearers would distinctly understand what the writer was speaking about. So we get a confirmation of the historical veracity of the narrative that is preserved in our Gospel. But the value of such words as these is their bearing upon far deeper things than that. They point to Gethsemane as showing us Christ, as the companion of our sorrows and supplications, as a pattern of our submissive, devout resignation, and as a lesson for us all how prayer is most truly answered.

First, then, take that great thought of my text, the Christ as being our companion in sorrow and in supplication. 'In the days of His flesh—when He bore what I bear—in the days of His flesh He offered prayer and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death.' Now I do not dwell at any length upon the additional contribution to the vividness and solemnity of the picture given us in the detail of the text before us, but I want to refer for one moment, and I will do it as reverently as I can, to the unapproachable narrative, and to make this one remark about it, that all the three evangelists who are our source of knowledge of that scene in the garden of

Gethsemane employ strange, and all but unexampled, words in order to express the condition of our Saviour's spirit then. Matthew, for instance, uses a word which, in our Bible, is translated 'He began to be very heavy.' Only once besides, as far as I know, is it employed in scripture, and it seems to mean something like 'On the very verge of despair.' And then Mark gives us the same singular expression, adding to it another one which is translated, 'sore amazed.' It has been suggested that a more adequate rendering would be 'began to be appalled,' and another suggestion has been, that it might be adequately rendered with the phrase 'that He began to be out of Himself.' Then comes Luke, with his word, which we have translated into English as 'agony.' And then there come Christ's own strange words, 'My soul is encompassed with sorrow almost up to the point of death.' That is not a proverb; I take that to be a literal fact that one more pang and the physical frame would have given way. Now, I do not point to these things in any spirit of curious investigation. I feel, I hope, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.' And yet I cannot help feeling that there is a tendency nowadays to say too little about the Gospel story of Christ's sufferings; it is a reaction, no doubt, and prompted by good motives; it is a reaction from the preaching of a former time, when men used these sacred narratives of our Lord's last days in the coarsest possible manner, and the climax of it is that horrible kind of preaching that Roman Catholic preachers used to indulge in—Passion sermons. And yet I cannot but feel that we are in danger of going to the other extreme and losing much by not sufficiently dwelling on the facts.

Then there is another point. What is the meaning of that—what is the explanation of all the passion, and paroxysm of agony, and fear, and bloody sweat, and horror-stricken appeal? Is it not a very, very unheroic picture that? Is it not strangely unlike the spirit in which many men and women, who drew all courage from Christ, have gone to their death? Is not the servant above his master here, if you will think of a Latimer at the stake, or of many a poor unknown martyr that went to his death as to his bed, and set that side by side with the shrinking of Christ? Well, dear brethren, I know the attempt to explain the flood of sorrow, of dread, and horror of great darkness that wrapt the soul of Jesus Christ in these last moments, on psychological principles, and say it is a pure and lofty end, shrinking from death; but it seems to me the only explanation of it all is the good old one: 'The Lord hath made to meet upon Him the iniquity of us all.' And so with the weight of the sins and the sorrows of the world, He began to be sorrowful and very heavy.

And then, passing on, let me deal with the matter from another point of view, and remind you that, whatsoever there may be all His own and beyond that reach of common humanity, experienced in the solemn and awful hour, yet it is also the revelation of a companionship that never fails us in all our struggles, tears, and prayers. Oh, how different that makes our passage through the lonely experience of our human life! There are times in every life when all human affection and all human voices fail in the presence of a great sorrow, and when you feel that you must tread this path alone. Although loving hands are stretched out to me through the darkness, and have grasped my own and helped me to stand, yet nothing will still the aching of the solitary heart except the thought of a Christ who has suffered it all already, and who, in the days of His flesh, offered up, with strong crying and tears, His prayer unto Him that was able to save. You remember the old Roman story—grand in its heroic simplicity—of the husband and the wife resolved to escape from the miseries of a tyrant-ridden world by suicide—which to them was less criminal than it is to us—and the wife first of all struck the dagger into her own heart, and drawing it out, embrued with her own blood, hands it to her husband, with the dying words 'Paetus! it is not painful.' The sharp edge that strikes into your heart, brethren, has cut into Christ's first, and the blade tinctured with His blood inflicts only healing wounds upon us. He is our priest because He has gone before us on every road of sorrow and loss, and is ready to sustain us when it comes to our turn to tread it.

And so turn for a moment to the other conception that is here, viz., that the same solemn scene shows us Christ as being, not only our companion in sorrow and supplication, but our pattern of submissive reverence. The language of my text needs just one word of explanation in order to show where this lies. You observe it reads, 'And was heard in that He feared.' Now, these last words, 'in that He feared,' have always received two varying expositions, and, I suppose, always will receive them. The text fairly allows one or the other. They may either mean, 'He was heard or delivered from the thing He dreaded'—which you know is not true—or they may mean that He was heard by reason of His reverence and submission, or, if we may use such a word—a word that is not Scriptural and very modern—was heard because of His piety. And I suppose the latter was distinctly the meaning in the writer's mind. Christ's prayer was, 'If it be possible.' and His second prayer was, 'If this cup may not pass from Me Thy will be done.' He felt the reluctance of the flesh to enter upon the path of suffering, the perfectly natural human shrinking from all that lay before Him. But that shrinking never made His purpose falter, nor made Him lose His son-like dependence upon the Father's will and submission to the Father's will. And so there come out of that, large lessons that I can only just touch for a moment.

And the first of them is this: let us learn and be thankful for the teaching, that resignation, submission to all the burdens and pains and struggles and sorrows which life brings to us, does not demand the suppression of the natural emotions and affections of the flesh. Christ recoiled from the cup, but Christ's submission was perfect. And so for us there are two ways. Inclination and duty will often draw us two different ways. Tastes and weaknesses will often suggest one thing, and the high sense of the path we ought to travel upon will suggest another. But the inclination must never be allowed to mount up into the region of the will and to make our purpose falter, or make us abandon that which we feel will be the rough path. Then there will be no sin in the fact that the flesh shrinks, as shrink it must, from the thing which duty demands we should do. Christ, the example of a perfect resignation, is an example of a will that mastered flesh. That is full of encouragement and strength to us in our time of need and conflict.

And then there is the other side of the same thought.

Not only does there often come into our life the struggle of duty and inclination, but there comes into our life sometimes the other struggle between submission and sorrow. In like manner there is no sin in the tear, there is no sin in the strong crying. It is meet that when His hand is laid heavy upon my heart, my heart should feel the pressure; it is meet that I should take into my consciousness and into my feeling the pain; and then it is meet that if I cannot do anything more—and I don't think we can—I should at least try through my tears to say, 'Not my will, but Thine'; and if I cannot do anything more, at least, 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth because Thou didst it.'

And the last point I touch upon is this, that according to the teaching of this commentary upon that solemn scene, our Lord in it sets before us the lesson of what the true answer to prayer is. 'He prayed unto Him that was able to save Him from death,' and says my text: 'He was heard.' Was He? How was He heard? He was heard in this. There appeared unto Him an angel from heaven strengthening Him. He was heard in this because His prayer was not 'Let this cup pass,' but His prayer was, 'Thy will be done,' and God's will was done.

And so there comes out the true heart of all true prayer, 'Thy will be done.' And the true answer that we get is, not the lifting away of the burden, but the breathing into our hearts strength to bear it, so that it ceases to be a burden. Let us make our prayers not petulant wishes to get our own way, but lowly efforts to enter into God's way and make His will ours, so shall come to us peace and strength, and a power adequate to our need. The cup will be sweetened, and our lips made willing to drink it. Christ was heard, and Christ was crucified.

Learn the lesson that if, in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, we make our requests known unto God, whatsoever other answer may be sent, or not sent, the real and highest answer will surely be sent, and the peace of God, which passeth understanding, shall keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

A FIELD WHICH THE LORD HATH BLESSED

'The earth, which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God.'—HEB. vi. 7.

THIS is a kind of parable or allegory in which echoes of many scriptures are gathered up. The comparisons of the process of forming character to the growth of a plant, of divine influences to the rain, of the discipline of life to husbandry, of holy deeds to fruit, are common to all languages; and recall many sayings of lawgiver and prophets, as well as many of the parables of our Lord. Especially there seems to be allusion here to the two parables of the Sower and the field that brought forth wheat and tares. But the old illustrations appear here with a somewhat new setting. The writer extends his vision beyond the fact of growth and fruitfulness to that which precedes it and to that which follows it. For fruitfulness there must be the drinking in of the rain from heaven. And if there be fruitfulness there will be God's blessing.

Then, further, in His estimate there are only two kinds of soil, one which bears wholesome fruits, and on which falls the perpetual dew of heaven's benediction the other which brings forth thorns and briars, and on which fall the lightnings of a curse that burns it and its miserable crop. Both soils are typical of professing Christians; in one or other of them each of us finds His likeness.

I. So then consider, first, the eager reception of divine influences.

In these Eastern lands all that is wanted to turn the desert into a paradise is irrigation. In the human heart what is wanted to bring forth fruit is, first, the reception of God's gifts and help. That goes dead in the teeth of a great deal of what we call 'culture,' and for want of believing it, and acting on it, much of the so-called culture is only elaborate vanity. It is no use trying to grow fruits in the desert until, as the men who made the Suez Canal did, you first of all bring the 'sweet water,' and then you will get your garden. Productivity, to use long words, begins with receptivity. You must first take in what God sends upon you before you can bring forth what God asks from you. The earth that 'drinketh in the rain' is the earth 'that bringeth forth the fruit.'

What is this rain that cometh oft, the reception of which is the indispensable preliminary to all true fruitfulness? If there be, as I suppose there is, some echo and reminiscence here of Isaiah's word about 'the rain coming down and the snow from heaven,' then the metaphor points to 'the Word of God that goeth forth out of His mouth.' And though I by no means take that to be the exclusive or even the principal application of the symbol, I cannot help dwelling upon that view for a moment. And in that aspect it comes to be this, if a Christian man wants to be fruitful let him begin by receiving, with interest and attention into his heart the truth in God's word. One main reason for the defects of our modern Christianity is that the average Christian man cares so little about his Bible; and has no real deep grip of, nor absorbed interest in, the great truths that it sets forth. No man gets any good out of a book or of a truth to which he does not attend with awakened interest and quickened curiosity. Look how you read your newspapers, and how interested you are in some trashy fiction, and contrast that with the way in which you read your Bibles. Do you drink in this Word, do you long to know more of the deep harmonies, of the profound mysteries, of the flashing illumination which it brings to all hearts that long for it? Can you say 'I have desired Thy testimonies more than all hidden riches'? My brother, there will be but few and shrivelled and immature fruits upon our lives unless they are 'planted by the rivers of water,' that is to say, as the psalm interprets it, unless we 'meditate on His law day and night.'

But there is a wider application to be given, as I take it, to the figure. The rain 'which cometh oft upon' the fruit-bearing earth, is a symbol for the whole sum of divine influences affecting mind, heart, conscience, will, and the whole inner man. From God there is ever streaming down upon His world, and especially upon His Church, spiritual influences reducible to no external agency, which find their way into the inmost heart. These come, not like the inadequate symbol of my text, in occasional showers, but they come rather as the rays come from the sun, by continual pulsating outwards, and perpetual efflux. So the prime requisite for fruit-bearing is the eager reception of all God's influences upon our spirits.

I venture to put what I have to say about this matter into four simple precepts. Desire them; expect them; welcome them; use them. So we shall drink them in.

Desire them. If there is a continual flowing out from God, by reason of His very nature, of these gracious influences to enlighten and to strengthen and to purify, then to desire them is to possess them, and without desiring them there is no possession. The heart opens when it desires, and the water finds its way, as is the nature of water, into the narrowest chink that it meets as it flows. Wherever there is a tiny crack there will be a little stream, and the wider the opening the fuller the blessing. Desire brings God; and they whose hearts are opened are they whose hearts are filled. Do you want the rain that comes down? Have you any wish to be made any better than you are. Would it be inconvenient to you if there came to you the efflux of the divine power, that would make you ashamed of your present Christianity, and would lift you up into heights of consecration, of daily honesty, and transparent business purity which perhaps do not mark you at present? Dear brethren, if many Christian people would be honest with themselves they would more often find out that, in spite of all their prayers, which come from their teeth outwards, they do not want more of God's influences, and would feel it extremely inconvenient to be laid hold of by a sanctifying power that should deliver them from the sins that they like. Desire, and you possess.

Expect and you will get. God cannot disappoint, and never did disappoint, expectations which turn to Him with the consciousness of need and the yearning for supply. But we limit His gifts because we limit our expectations of them; and instead of widening these t the large infinitude of His bestowments, we shrink His bestowments to the miserable narrowness of our expectations. Suppose a king were to send out a proclamation that any man might come to his treasuries, and take away as many sacks full of gold as he liked, and the more the better; do you think he would consider himself most honoured by the man that brought a wagon or by him who brought a basket? We bring our little vessels to the great fountain, and we put it to shame by the smallness of the expectations with which we meet the largeness of the promises. Expect the gift, and the gift will answer and vindicate —ay! and put to shame—your expectation. Desire them; expect them.

Welcome them. There is a vulgar old proverb that says, 'Put out your tubs when it is raining.' Be sure that when the gift is falling you fling your hearts wide for its acceptance. Such welcome will not be given unless there be a profound sense of need, an almost painful consciousness of deficiency and failure, and unless there be above all a firm and confident expectation and faith in His bestowments. If we desired eagerly the coming of the blessing, how our hearts would leap when the blessing came. It should be a tree of life, as the Book of Proverbs says about hopes fulfilled. But alas! alas! the bulk of professing average Christians of this day are liker the soaked and saturated soil of this summer, which takes in no more of the rain that falls, but lets it stagnate on the surface. Everybody that has ever watered a dry garden knows how the liquid treasure sinks in, and how every particle of earth seems to have a mouth to grasp it, and to make it its own. Do you welcome in that fashion, my brother, God's gifts so lavishly bestowed upon you, or do you let them lie on the surface stagnating and unprofitable as far as you are concerned? Desire them; expect them; welcome them.

Use them. Because in using them you will use them up, and that will leave room for more; and 'unto him that hath shall be given.' And he that has faithfully utilised the smallest measure of God's gift to him, receives a larger; just as you trust your children with halfpence before you trust them with shillings, and proportion the amount you have put in their hands to what you have seen of the wisdom of their use of the smaller amount.

So, dear friends, to sum it all up, here is the condition of all fruit-bearing. The prime characteristic of a Christian heart ought to be this hungering and thirsting after larger bestowments of God's influences. Alas! alas! for the professing Christians who are impervious to the rain that comes oft upon them. For God's gifts are never inoperative. In countries where the timber has been unwisely felled, and the hillside stripped, the rain has nothing to lay hold of, and nothing to do, and it sweeps down the mountain side in a tawny torrent, bearing away the little superfluous soil that still clings to the rocks, and after a while these stand up gaunt and bare, neither sunshine nor rain can stimulate vegetation on their naked precipitous face, but only crumble them into slow decay. So either we are welcoming God's influences into our hearts, and turning rain into fruit, or they are denuding the soil still more, and making us yet more infertile. The land 'that drinketh in the rain' bears the fruit; the land that does not is thereby cursed into more barren barrenness.

II. Now note secondly, and only a word about that, the tillage.

My text speaks of 'them *for* whom' (not as our Authorised Version has it, '*by* whom') it is dressed. And possibly there may be a distinction between those, whoever they may be, who are supposed to receive the fruit of the field, and those who carry on the labour of cultivation. If so, we should have a parallel thought to the many both in the Old and in the New Testament which represent God's ministers and messengers as being labourers in His vineyard. But more probably the distinction between the owner and the labourers is neglected in our text, and we are simply to think of the 'dressing' as referring to another department of the divine operations. God not only pours upon us as from above these gracious skyey influences, which are to be received into our hearts, but He deals with us in our daily life, by external providences and discipline. So the text reminds us of 'My Father is the husbandman,' and of Paul's word, 'Ye are God's husbandry,' and the tillage that is here spoken of is the whole sum of the external circumstances of our lives, as contrasted with the rain, that represents the whole sum of the spiritual influences brought to bear upon us within.

There is the true point of view from which to look on life. It is God's husbandry. The ploughshare has a very sharp edge, and it is dragged with unsparing accuracy in the straight, deep furrow; and it cuts through stiff soil, and sometimes turns up and divides hidden treasures that lie beneath. Nobody likes to have his fallow ground broken up; nobody likes to have the ploughshare of sorrow driven through the little warm nest that lay below the surface; nobody likes the discipline, but it is God's husbandry. If there were no ploughing, if there were no harrows with their cruel multiplied teeth to be dragged clean across quivering hearts, there would not be any harvest. Do not let us misunderstand the meaning of our sorrows. God by them is 'dressing' His own fields, and let us take care that, when we are thinking of the means by which He seeks to promote our fertility, we do not forget to set by the side of the gracious rain that distils from the heavens the better discipline that is exercised upon the earth.

III. Thirdly, note the fruitfulness.

There is only one crop from a man's nature which God dignifies with the name of fruit. The rest, be it what it may, is thorns and thistles. One of the apostles talks about 'the unfruitful fruit of darkness.' Darkness has plenty of work; has it not? There are abundant results, some of them very satisfactory, very beautiful, very desirable, in a number of ways, from the lives of men who do not take in these divine influences. Are we not to call them fruit? Is every human life, except a life of consistent godliness and lowly faith manifested in works, a barren life? So the Bible says. And that cuts very sharp, and goes very deep, and rebukes a great many of us. Culture is all very well. Refinement, education, business prosperity, taste, affection, etc., are all right in their places. If they come from, and are rooted in, faith in Jesus Christ, and obedience therefore to God's will, they are fruit; if they do not, they are thorns, wild grapes and not true ones. The only thing that a man does that is worth calling fruit, because it is the only thing that will last, and the only thing that corresponds to his capacities and responsibilities, is that which he does for the sake of, and by the strength of, the dear Lord that loved him, and gave Himself for him. That is fruit; all the rest is sham—nothing but leaves.

Again, notice that great thought, that the deeds of a poor man, who has taken in these divine influences, are a harvest meet for, and acceptable to, the owner; or, to put it into words without metaphor, God delights in, and in some sense feeds upon, the righteous deeds of His children. That great thought is put in many ways and in many places in Scripture. 'He came, being hungered, seeking fruit,' on the fig-tree. 'An odour of a sweet smell'—another metaphor expressing the same idea—'acceptable to God.' In the old ritual there was the singular institution of what we call the 'shewbread,' the 'bread of the face,' as the Hebrew means, which was spread before God, and lay there in the sanctuary, typical of the righteous deeds of His children, which were offered up to Him. In the same sense my text speaks of 'fruit meet for those for whom it is dressed'—such a crop as corresponds to the desires of the owner, and to the care and husbandry that He has lavished upon His field.

A farmer is proud if the produce of his farm is taken for the royal table. Can there be a loftier conception of the possible greatness of the poorest, lowliest Christian service than this, that it is 'meet for the Master's use'; and that even He will find delight in partaking of it? And does not Jesus Christ say the same thing to us in other language when He says from heaven, 'If any man open the door, I will come in and will sup with him'—'He shall provide the meal, he shall spread the table, and I will partake of that which he brings.' It is the highest motive that can be brought to bear upon us, to make our deeds, for His dear sake, pure and noble and lofty, that thereby they become, in His infinite mercy, not unworthy to be offered to Him, and capable of ministering delight to

His heart. And it is a test, too, for if your work is not meet for Christ to accept, it is not meet for you to do.

IV. Lastly, mark the blessing from God.

My text is spoken in immediate connection with the statement of the writer's purpose, to lead his hearers from the elements to the perfection of Christian truth. Such progress he considers the proper result of the earlier stages, and the statement of that principle is embodied in the metaphor of my text. Stripping it of its figure, it comes to this, that in the narrower view righteousness give an insight into truth, and in the wider view, that fruitfulness is rewarded by progress in the Christian life. I have no time, nor is there need, to dwell upon the elements of this blessing from God; let me put what I have to say in just two or three sentences.

The fruitfulness which is the result of the reception of the divine influences has for its consequence the blessing which is more of these divine influences, therefore more fruitfulness and consequently more work. Faithfulness in the use of the less leads on to the assured possession of the greater, as is true in all regions of life, as is true as between earth and heaven, and as is true in the growth of the Christian soul here below. And as the reception of the blessing makes capable of a larger blessing, so the larger reception of these divine influences results in larger fruitfulness. The reward of fertility is greater fertility, and that is the highest reward that God can give us for it. It is the reward that makes heaven, for that is a sphere in which, with larger capacities, we shall bring forth nobler results of service and of character. The plant that is here an exotic is taken there into its native soil, and spreads a broader branch, and opens a greener leaf, and bends down boughs laden with richer and more abundant fruit, and in the fruit is neither spot nor blemish nor any such thing. The blessing of God is, most of all, the larger communication of His own sweet and precious influences, and consequently the growing fruitfulness which brings growing glory to Him, and growing gladness to ourselves. The reward for work is more work, and a wider sphere for nobler service. Add to that the consciousness of God's smile reflected in the quiet of an unaccusing conscience, and the tranquillity that comes from a submissive will and unselfish consecration, and we have at least some of the elements of that 'blessing from God.'

So, dear friends, there is a picture of what is possible for every one of us. We may all make our lives like what the Pentateuch describes the land of Israel as being, 'a land which drinketh in of the water of the rain of heaven, a land which the Lord thy God careth for, for the eyes of the Lord thy God are on it continually.' If we receive the influences we shall bring forth the fruit, and we shall get the blessing.

THE QUEEN AND THE VIRGINS THAT FOLLOW HER

'But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.'—HEB. vi. 9.

THE writer has been describing, in very stern and solemn words, the fate of apostates, and illustrating it by the awful metaphor of 'the earth which . . . beareth thorns and briars,' and which is, therefore, 'rejected, and is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.' Then he softens, and knowing that rebukes are never so pointed as when the arrow is feathered by love, he changes his voice. 'But, beloved'—they needed to be assured that all the thundering and lightning did not mean anger, but affection—'we are persuaded better things of you, and those things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.'

Wherever, then, salvation is, certain other things will also be.

Now, of course, it is clear that the word salvation is not here used to mean the ultimate, complete deliverance from all evil of sorrow or sin, and the ultimate, complete endowment with all good of joy and holiness, but for that earlier stage of itself—which unfortunately, too often is supposed to be all that is needed, and to be sure to last, if once possessed, whether diligently tended or left neglected—the initial gifts which are received by a convert in the very beginning of his Christian career, viz., the assurance of divine forgiveness, and the establishment of a new relation between him and God. It is that initial and incomplete salvation of which the writer is here thinking. And, he says, it does not come alone. Like a planet set in the heavens, with moons that circle round it; like a diamond set in a cluster of precious stones; like some queen with her train of attendants, when that incipient salvation comes into a soul, it comes companioned by other blessings that are its natural and necessary attendants and accompaniments.

And what are these? The whole context is full of instruction as to what they are. We can gather them all up into the one metaphor—fruitfulness; or to put away the metaphor, we can gather them all up into the one phrase, 'a holy life.' That, or these—for the one phrase, 'a holy life,' will break up and effloresce into all manner of beautifulnesses and goodnesses—are 'the things that accompany salvation.'

It is plain that the possession of 'salvation' is sure to lead to that result. For it is something more than a judge's pardon; it is a Father's forgiveness, and even if it were nothing more than forgiveness, it would, as such, set in operation new emotions and aims in the child's heart and will. God's forgiveness does not only take away guilt, but breaks the power of sin. But surely the faintest dawn of salvation brings a new life which has affinities for all righteousness and every form of goodness, and brings the forgiven man under the influence of new motives, drawn from his blessed new experience of the 'mercies of God,' and strongly impelling him to that grateful, happy yielding of himself as a living sacrifice, from which whatsoever things are lovely and of good report are sure to spring, as naturally as rare exotics will, even in our northern cold, when the right temperature is maintained in the conservatory. The initial salvation sets us in new relations with God; it puts into us a new life, infantile and needing much care in its feebleness, no doubt, but still capable of growth to power and maturity, and even in infancy like the new-born Hercules, able to strangle the serpents. The initial salvation turns us in a new direction, changes our estimate of things to be pursued and avoided, gives new standards, new aims, new desires, new power to reach these aims, to satisfy these desires. 'If any man be in Christ'—even if he has but this moment entered, and has gone but a step or two in—'he is a new creature; old things are passed away, all things have become new.' Simultaneous with the rapturous new assurance that God loves and forgives, come the inclination towards, and possibility of, a new life of holiness. It is for the most part an undeveloped possibility, and will need much careful tending, and much fencing off of infantile diseases, and much discipline, before it comes to a 'perfect man' after the pattern of Jesus; but the life is there, and, with fair play, will come to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. 'Salvation' never enters alone, but ever is attended by a train of fair virgins.

Now, from this thought of the primacy of salvation and the subordinate place of its certain accompaniments, important practical results follow. One of these is what we Christians need to have perpetually recalled to our minds, namely, that the way to increase our possession of the accompaniments is to increase our possession of the central blessing which they accompany, and therefore that the true course for us to pursue, if we would live that holy life which accompanies salvation, is to seek to increase, first, our possession of those primary experiences that constitute salvation the sense of the divine favour, the consciousness of the forgiving and reconciling love of God, and to strive to increase that faith, by which a fuller tide of salvation will flow into our more widely opened hearts. Begin with that with which God begins; seek to have more of the divine salvation; that is the best way to get more of the graces that accompany it. Welcome the entrance of the queen, and her train of attendants, in all the variety of their sweet loveliness and feminine graces, will follow her. 'The things that accompany salvation' are best secured by making sure, and increasing our conscious possession of, the salvation which they accompany. To aim at possessing the graces of character which are the results of conscious enjoyment of salvation, without that enjoyment, is like the folly that would begin building a house at the roof-tree. Such graces may be partially produced without 'salvation,' but they are but like artificial flowers in comparison with the sweet children of the dew and sun, and have no fragrance and no life.

But another needful lesson is that the best test and evidence of our being saved, men and women, is our manifesting in our lives these certain attendants on salvation. We should be very sceptical of the genuineness of any profession of being 'saved,' whether made by ourselves or by others, which is not manifestly accompanied by these, its inevitable consequences and attendants. The pure heart, the clean hands, the truth-speaking tongue, the loving disposition, the integrity in business, the control of one's own dispositions and tempers and tastes and appetites, and all these other fair traits of character which are the constituents of a holy life, the manifold rays which melt into the one white light of holiness—these things are the only tokens for the world, and the principal tests for myself, of the reality of my salvation. They are not the only tests for us. Thank God, Christian men do not need to take only the indirect method of determining the genuineness of their faith and love by examining their outward lives. They can say, 'I have felt, I know and Thou knowest, that I love Thee.' As to others, our only way of knowing whether the watch is going, is to note whether the hands are travelling round the dial, but for ourselves, we may have direct consciousness of our emotions, being, as it were, inside the watch case and aware of its working. Yet, since we can hoodwink ourselves about our inward state, and inspection of ourselves is always difficult, and its results apt to be biased by what we wish to find within, we have all much need to check our judgments of ourselves, especially in regard to our faith and love, which are the conditions of our possessing salvation, by the test of our actions, which we are less liable to misconstrue, and which will often tell us unwelcome, but wholesome truth. We shall be wise if we habitually test our Christian emotion by our conduct in the rough road of daily life, and if we gravely suspect the depth and genuineness of all feeling, however sweet and lofty it seems, which does not come out into action. If our Christian experience is worth anything, it will drive the wheels of self-sacrificing duty. It takes tons of pitchblende to make a drachm of radium, and it needs much experience of the possession of salvation, and many precious and secret inward emotions in order to produce the life of self-sacrifice which is the ultimate test of the worth of our religion. If these certain accompaniments are wanting, or are sparse and lacking in radiance in our lives, it is high time that we asked ourselves very seriously what the worth to us is of a salvation that does not produce in us 'the things that accompany salvation.'

But the text suggests another thought to which we may now turn. It is that where these accompaniments of initial salvation are present, further salvation will follow. The whole of the context, including my text itself, goes upon the principle that whilst a holy life, or, to put it into other words, 'good works,' is, or are, the accompaniments of the initial salvation, they are the causes of a fuller salvation. For look what follows, and look what preceded our text. 'The earth which drinketh in the rain'—that is step number one—and that drinking in of the rain is the initial act of faith which opens thirstily for the entrance of the initial salvation. Then follows—'and bringeth forth herbs'—that is the second step, and corresponds to the holy life of which I have been speaking; and finally comes 'receiveth a blessing from God,' which corresponds to a fuller salvation. After the text we read: 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith and labour of love' which implies a promise of rich reward.

That is to say, if we have these accompaniments, and do our very best to make them conspicuous and continuous and more thoroughly the mainsprings of our actions, then we shall receive a fuller salvation, just because we have thus sought to appropriate and to develop the consequences in our conduct of the partial salvation with which we were started at first. Salvation is a great word which in Scripture is presented in many aspects. Sometimes it is spoken of as a thing in the past experience of the Christian; sometimes it is spoken of as a thing which he is progressively realising throughout his life: 'The Lord added to the Church daily such as were being saved'; sometimes it is spoken of as an experience which is reserved for the future, 'receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls,' in that life beyond.

Now, this experience or possession, call it which you like, or state of spirit and heart, which has its roots in the past, and is being developed all through the Christian life, and is to be perfected in the future world, has for one chief cause of its progressive increase in our own consciousness, a holy life. And if we, as good ground, are trying 'to bring forth herbs meet for Him by whom it is dressed,' we shall be like the earth softened by the rain, and smiling with harvest, on which God smiles down in the sunshine of His approval, and which He visits with His benediction. We shall possess a fuller salvation. A firmer grasp of the great truths which bring salvation when received, and of all their consequences of peace and joy, and spiritual elevation and calm, a closer union with Jesus, a larger endowment of the Spirit, will follow our faithful attempts to 'perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord,' and so to possess, and to present, more of 'the things that accompany salvation.' Good works are a cause of a fuller salvation.

The most fruitful Christians need to be warned against possible barrenness and apostasy.

'We are persuaded better things of you, beloved'—but yet, though persuaded, the writer felt that he must 'thus speak.' For we never get beyond the risk of fruitlessness. We never get beyond the need of effort to resist the tendencies that draw us away. We never get beyond the need of warnings. It is always safe for us to look at the field that is bristling 'with briars and thorns, and is nigh unto cursing.' Therefore the warning note is sounded, and it is sounded, thank God! in order that what it points to as possible, may never be actual for any of us.

We all need warning, but those of us who, like myself, are set to give it sometimes, have to remember that it loses all its force unless it is manifestly the warning of love. 'Beloved! persuaded,' as we are, 'of better things of you,' it yet is our solemn duty thus to speak, that thus it may never be with any of you. And it is the less likely to be the case with any of us that we shall bear but 'thorns and briars,' the more we remember that it is possible for us all, and will be possible until the very end.

SURE AND CERTAIN HOPE

'We desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.'—HEB. vi. 11.

MANY of us have seen a picture in which the artist paints 'Hope' as a pale, fragile figure, blind, and bent, wistfully listening to the poor music which her own finger draws from a broken one-stringed lyre. It is a profoundly true and pathetic confession. So sad, languid, blind, yearning, self-beguiled is Hope, as most men know her.

Put side by side with that the figure which an unknown sculptor has carved on one of the capitals of the ducal palace in Venice, where Hope lifts up praying hands and a waiting, confident face to a hand stretched out towards her from a glory of sunbeams. Or set by the side of the picture our own great poet's picture—

> 'Upon her arm a silver Anchor lay,
> On which she leaned ever, as befell;
> And ever up to Heaven as she did pray,
> Her steadfast eyes were bent, nor swerved other way.'

Who does not feel the contrast between the two conceptions? What makes the difference? The upward look. When Hope is directed heavenwards she is strong, assured, and glad.

My text speaks of the certitude and the blessedness of Christian hope, and of the discipline by which it is to be cultivated.

I. Let us look then, first, at the certainty of Christian hope

Universal experience tells us that hope means an anticipation which is less than sure. Hopes and fears are bracketed together in common language, as always united, like a double star, one black and the other brilliant, which revolve round a common axis, and are knit together by invisible bands. But if we avail ourselves of the possibilities in reference to the future, which Christianity puts into our hands, our hope may be no less certain than our memory, and even more sure than it. For the grounds on which Christian men may forecast their future as infinitely bright and blessed, as the possession of an inheritance incorruptible, as absolute and entire conformity to the likeness of God, which is peace and joy, are triple, each of them affording certitude.

The Christian hope is builded on no mere projection of our longings into a hypothetical and questionable future. It is no mere deduction from probabilities, from guesses. It is no mere child of a wish, but it rests, immovable, on these three solid pillars—an eternal God to whom all Time is subject, a past fact and a present experience.

It rests upon the eternal God to whom all the future is certain and upon His faithful word, which makes it as certain to us. In the Old Testament God is 'the Hope of Israel,' and the devout heart's language is, 'I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait; and in His word do I hope.' In the New, Christ is our hope; and, as the context here tells us, the two immutable things, God's promise and His oath, lay the foundation for unshaken confidence.

And not only so, but our hope further rests on a past fact: 'He hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' The one real proof that when we paint heaven we are not painting mist and moonshine is the fact that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. Men before Him have hoped and feared, and said: 'Perhaps it may be; "I am *afraid* it is," or "I *hope* it is"'; but there is all the difference in the world between saying, 'A man *can* possibly live again'; or 'he *may* probably live again'; or 'he will, I *believe*, live again'; and saying, 'a Man *has* lived again, and having died *has* risen.' There were many reasons for believing in America before Columbus came back and said, 'I have been there.' And there are many reasons, no doubt, that may incline sanguine spirits and wearied spirits and desiring spirits, and even sin-stricken and guilty spirits, to anticipate a life beyond, which shall be a hope or a dread; but there is only one ground upon which men can say: 'We know that it is not cloud-land, but solid earth'; and that is, that our Brother *has* come back from the bourne from which 'no traveller returns'; that He thereby has shown us all, not by argumentation but by historical fact, that to die is not to cease to be; that to die draws after it the resurrection of the body. We lift our eyes to the heavens, and though 'the cloud receive Him out of our sight,' hope, which is better than vision, pierces the cloud and travels straight on to the throne whilst He bends from His crowned glory and says: 'Because I live ye shall live also.'

'Our everlasting hopes arise
Above the ruinable skies,'

and they are built upon no dreams of our own, nor is the music drawn from the lyre by our poor fingers, but they are built on the steadfast word of the eternal God, to whom past, present, and future are one; and they are built on the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And then, still further, the Christian hope is based, not only on these two strong pillars, but on a third—namely, on present experience.

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, has, in two different places, a very interesting and instructive genealogy, if I might so call it, of Christian hope; and in both places (the fifth and the fifteenth chapters) he traces the hope of the Christian to a double and apparently opposite source. He says: 'Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' And in the similar passage, in the other chapter, he speaks about being filled with 'joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope.' So then, there he traces the Christian hope to the present experience of forgiveness, and of access by faith into present grace; or, as he puts it in briefer words in the other place, to the present experience of 'joy and peace in believing.'

But there is another side to our experience which likewise issues in hope. 'And not only so, but we glory in tribulation also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience,'—brave endurance, and that brave endurance of ours, inasmuch as it is something beyond our own reach and strength, works in us the proof of a divine power operating upon us; and that proof of a divine power operating upon us produces in us hope, and hope 'makes not ashamed.' That is to say, the dark as well as the bright side of the Christian experience, its sorrows as well as its joys, the burdens which have been borne, the trials which we have survived, demonstrate to us that we are not left to fight alone, but that a mighty hand is ever around us, and a gracious arm holding us up, and therefore all these darker and sadder moments of the Christian life do likewise tend towards the enkindling in the spirit of a 'hope that maketh not ashamed.'

So, both by reason of what we experience of peace and joy, and by reason of what we experience of trial, disaster, difficulty borne, and unwelcome duties done, in the might of God, we are entitled to say—we know that a rest remains, where trouble is done with, and all that was here tendency shall be perfected, and the divine and immortal elements of joy and peace shall enfold themselves completely in our happy experience. You can tell a cedar of Lebanon, though it is not yet bigger than a dandelion, and know what it is coming to. You can tell the infant prince. And the joy and peace of faith, feeble and interrupted as they may be in our present experience, have on them the stamp of supremacy and are manifestly destined for dominion over our whole nature. They are indeed experiences 'whose very sweetness yieldeth proof that they were born for immortality.' I have often seen in rich men's greenhouses some exotic plant grown right up to the roof, which had to be raised in order to let it go higher. The Christian life here is plainly an exotic, growing where it cannot attain its full height, and it presses against the fragile over-arching glass, yearning upwards to the open sky and the throne of God. So, because we can love so much and do love so little, because we can trust thus far and do trust no more, because we have some spark of the divine life in us, and that spark so contradicted and thwarted and oppressed, there must be somewhere a region which shall correspond to this our deepest nature, and the time must come when the righteous, who here shone but so dimly, shall 'blaze forth like the sun in the Kingdom of the Father.'

Blessed it is that this guiding torch of Christian hope can be kindled from both of these sources. We can light it both with the sunbeams of joy and peace, focused in the burning glass of faith, and with a spark struck by the sharp collision of the hard steel and flint, in the night of sorrow. Thus all the experience of a believing soul is evidence of the certainty of the Christian hope.

Brethren! do not trust yourselves to a hope that is less than certitude, nor grovel along these low levels, concerning which the warning is always to be repeated: 'Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what the day may bring forth,' but aspire and lift your hope to heaven, then you may be sure that 'To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

II. Now let me say a word in the next place as to the assurance of the Christian hope.

Certainty is one thing, and assurance is another. A man may have the most firm conviction based upon the most unsubstantial foundation. His expectation may have no roots to it, and yet the confidence with which he cherishes the expectation may be perfect. There may be entire assurance without any certainty; and there may be what people call objective certainty with a very tremulous and unworthy subjective assurance.

But the only temper that corresponds to and is worthy of the absolute certainties with which the Christian man has to deal is the temper of unwavering and assured confidence. Do not disgrace the sure and steadfast anchor by fastening a slim piece of packthread to it that may snap at any moment. Do not build flimsy structures upon the rock and put up upon such a foundation canvas shanties that any puff of wind may sweep away. If you have a staff to lean upon which will neither give, nor warp, nor crack, whatever stress is put upon it, see that you lean upon it, not with a tremulous finger, but with your whole hand. The wavering, hesitating, half and half confidence with which a large number of us grasp the absolute certainties of our hope, is a degradation to the hope and a disgrace to the hoper. There is nothing that is worthy of certitude but assurance; and he who knows that his hope is not vain ought to make a conscience of having a response to the outward certainty in the inward unwavering confidence. But so far is that from being the case that there is a type of Christian life, not so common nowadays, perhaps, as it used to be, which makes a merit of not being sure, and takes it as the sign of Christian humility not to venture on saying, 'I know in whom I have believed and that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him.'

O dear friends! these dim expectations, clouded all over with earthly doubts and indifference, these languid hopes with which we lift scarcely interested and almost incredulous eyes to the crown, are the opprobrium of our Christianity, and the weakness of our whole lives.

Be sure of this, that the more certain the assurance of hope, the more calm and sober it will be. It is the element of uncertainty in anticipation that makes it feverish. When it is fully confident and grasps the thing that it knows is coming, the pulse throbs no faster nor more irregularly, though, thank God! far more fully, by reason of the blessed hope. If we want to live in 'sober certainty' of coming bliss, and calmed, and steadied, and made ready for all service, endurance, and suffering, by the brightness of our hope, we must see to it that it is not dim and wavering, but sure and steadfast, certain as God, as the history of Christ, as the present. It is certain. Make it assured.

Let me remind you further that this assured hope is permanent. 'The full assurance unto the end,' my text says. 'Unto the end.' How many a lighthouse that you and I once steered towards is behind us now! As we get older, how many of the aims and hopes that drew us on have sunk below the horizon! And how much less there is left for us people with grey hairs in our heads and years on our backs to hope for, than we used to think there was! But, dear brethren, what does it matter though the sea be washing away the coast on one side the channel if it is depositing fertile land on the other? What does it matter though the earthly hopes are becoming fewer and those few graver and sadder, if the one great hope is shining brighter? Winter nights are made brilliant by keener stars than soft summer evenings show, and the violet and red and green streamers that fill the northern heavens only come in the late year. So it is well and blessed for us if, when the leaves fall, we see a wider sky; and if, as hope dies for earth, it revives and lives again for heaven. 'The full assurance of hope to the end.'

III. Lastly, note here the culture of this certitude of hope.

My text is an exhortation to all Christian people 'to show the same diligence' in order to such an assurance. The same diligence as what? The same diligence as they had shown 'in their work and labour of love towards God's name.' That is to say, the people to whom my Epistle was sent had been extremely diligent and vigorous in what I may call practical Christianity. The writer wants them to be as diligent in reference to the emotional and experimental side of Christianity. Now, that fits a good many of us. The fashionable type of a Christian to-day is a worker. By common consent theology seems put into the background, and by almost as common consent there is comparatively little said about what our fathers used to call 'experimental religion,' feelings, emotions, inward experiences, but everything is drive, drive, drive at getting people to work. God forbid that I should say one word against that. But 'we desire that ye should show the *same* diligence' as in your mission-halls and schools and various other benevolent operations, in cultivating the emotions and sentiments—yes, and the doctrinal beliefs of the Christian life, or else you will be lopsided Christians.

Further, did it ever occur to you, Christian people, that your hope was a thing to be cultivated, that you ought to set yourselves to distinct and specific efforts for that purpose? Have you ever done so? How is it to be done? What I was saying a few minutes ago as to its grounds carries the answer to that question. Get into the habit of meditating upon the objects towards which it is directed, and the grounds on which it is built. If you never lift your eyes to the goal you will never be drawn towards it. If you never think about heaven it will have no attraction for you. If you never go over the basis of your hope your hope will get dim, and there will be little realisation or lifting power in it. I believe that the great bulk of nominal Christians in England to-day rarely think about their future certainties, and, more rarely still, test their foundation and see that it stands firm. No wonder, then, that hope so seldom lends her light, and that such a dim one, to shine upon their paths.

Let me say, lastly, in the matter of practical advice, that this cultivation of the assurance of hope is largely to be effected by pruning the wild luxuriance and earthward-stooping tendrils of our hope. The Apostle Peter has a wise word:—'Gird up the loins of your mind; be sober, and hope to the end.' That is to say, the perfection of Christian anticipation and assurance is only possible as the result of effort, and rigid abstinence from many earthly treasures. If you want the tree to grow high, nip the side shoots and the leader will gain strength. If you desire that your hope should ever be vigorous you must be abstinent from, or temperate in, earthly things Neither love nor hope can serve two masters; and if you are always occupied in forecasting earthly good, you will have little faculty left over, out of which to weave the far fairer fabric of eternal blessedness. If you pluck the wing feathers out of your hope, by your worldliness, by your selfishness, by your sin, it will be like some free forest bird, caught, clipped, and condemned to the barn-yard, only going about there picking up corn, instead of rising to heaven with its song.

Dear brethren, God has given every one of us this great and strange faculty of forecasting the future. Surely He gave it to us for some better purpose than that we should taste our earthly pleasures twice, or be impelled along our worldly course by a series of illusions. If you keep it down on the low levels of the contingent and the perishable and the temporal, and send it out only to bring you back tidings from the world, it will play you false; and you will find out that the disappointments of realised hopes are often as bitter as the disappointments of unfulfilled ones.

Do not be slaves of that pale, sad maiden with the blinded eyes and the broken lyre. Do not listen to the singing in your own ears and mistake it for heavenly music. There is one region where your hope can expatiate among certainties. Grasp Christ and you will then lift expectant eyes that will not look in vain to the Hand that reaches to you out of the blaze of the sunbeams, and is laden with blessednesses for the present which are sure promises for the future. The Christian man alone is certain of what he anticipates; and he alone will have to say 'The half hath not been told me.' For all others 'their hope shall be cut off, and their trust shall be as a spider's web.'

SLOTHFULNESS AND ITS CURE

'That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.'—HEB. vi. 12.

This is the end of a sentence, and the result of something that has been stated before. What is that? 'We desire that every one of you do show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.' Diligence is the opposite of slothfulness, and the former is to be cultivated that the latter may not overtake us. But it is 'the *same* diligence,' and that expression raises the question—The same as what? Now the writer has just been praising his readers for 'their work of faith and labour of love' which they showed in ministering to the saints. And then he says, in effect, 'I wish that you took as much trouble to cultivate your own Christian graces as you do to help other people in regard to these outward matters, for then there would be no fear of your becoming slothful, and you would be treading in the steps of those that have gone before, and who now inherit the promises.'

That is to say, there are a good many Christian people who spend a good deal more pains and effort upon the less central and deep things of Christian conduct than they do upon the keeping of the centre and mainspring of all in active operation. Some of us need the hint—'Look after your own Christian graces as diligently as you do after works of benevolence.'

I. Note here, then, first, a danger that still threatens all Christians.

The words of my text in our Authorised Version are somewhat inadequately translated, and the first clause would much more truly read, 'that ye become not slothful' than that 'ye be not slothful.' The same somewhat peculiar word, which is here rendered 'slothful,' is employed a little before in the letter, where the writer is excusing himself for not entering upon some deep truths, because he says to his readers, 'You have become dull of hearing.' It is the same word that is employed here, and we might paraphrase the meaning somewhat thus: 'You have become dull of hearing; take care lest you become dull all through. The palsy has begun in your ears, and it will spread to your eyes and your hands and your heart before long, if you do not mind.' The first sign of a growing torpor and indifference in the Christian life generally lies here—in carelessness in accepting the teaching of

Christian truth. The ear becomes dull, and the whole man follows suit, and becomes languid. And this danger of becoming 'slothful,' not so much in the sense of not working, as of being dull and torpid, inert, having no feeling, having no active energy in the inner life; half asleep, paralysed—this is the danger that hangs ever over all of us, and is only to be faced victoriously in one way, and that is the way which the writer of this Epistle here points out—namely, by unslumbering diligence and continual watchfulness against the creeping on of this subtle palsy. As surely as friction will stop a train, unless there is the perpetual repetition of the impulse that drives it, as surely as the swing of the pendulum will settle into a vertical position, drawn by the gravitation of the earth, unless the mainspring urges it on moment by moment, so surely will the most vigorous, cheery, active Christian character gradually become duller and duller, until it settles down into a condition indistinguishable from death, except on condition of unslumbering vigilance and constant effort. We are all tending to become slothful, sluggish, and we may overcome the tendency if, and only if, we set ourselves with all our hearts to do it. If you take a ladleful of molten metal out of a blast furnace, and set it down on the ground and leave it, in half an hour's time there is a scum on the top and its temperature has lowered, I know not how many degrees, and presently all heat will have gone from it. No warmth, no depth of feeling, no firmness of resolution, no joy of clear faith will last of itself. We have to keep the flame alight and alive. 'We desire that every one do use the same diligence that ye become not'—as you certainly will if you do not use it—'sluggish, or torpid Christians.'

II. The next point here is the way by which that tendency can be victoriously faced and overcome.

It was by 'faith and patience' that all the men of old had reached the true land of promise and entered on the inheritance of the saints in light. And these are still the means by which the ever-present pressure of that tendency to become slothful is to be overcome. Now it is important to remember that in this Epistle 'faith' predominately means that faculty by which we lay hold of the unseen, and realise future blessings as our own. So it is used in the great eleventh chapter, in which the writer, as it were, reads the muster-roll of the heroes of the faith in order to establish his contention that the bond between God's saints and Him has always been one and the same—namely, faith. Of course, that shade of meaning of the word rises up quite naturally from the other aspect in which it is most frequently used in the New Testament—viz., the reliance upon Jesus Christ, for He Himself is for us the revealer of things unseen, and the certifier and assurer of the things hoped for in the future. But the predominant reference of the word in this letter is, as I say, to the attitude of mind by which we grasp the unseen, and make the future blessings which God promises to us our own by anticipation. And, says the writer, that faith which thus stretches out a long arm through the mists to lay hold of the solidities that are beyond the mists, that faith is the means by which we shall most effectually ward off the tendency to sluggishness and inertness, which will otherwise get the better of us all.

The word here employed for patience is not the ordinary one used for that virtue, which means chiefly perseverance in a given course of conduct in spite of many difficulties, and pressures of sorrows and troubles. But the word employed here is the same which is often rendered 'long-suffering.' This 'patience' is not to be regarded as something added to faith, but rather, it is the characteristic result of faith. The faith which, although the vision tarries, waits, and is not shaken, though many days may pass and we seem little nearer the realisation of our hopes; an obstinate, persistent, long-lasting confidence and realisation of the unseen and future good is what the writer recommends to us here as the sovereign antidote, which by our own efforts we may secure, against the tendency to slumber and to death. By faith which is long-breathed, and can live below the water for a long time, believing in the blue heavens that are above, a faith which is patient, we shall overcome the tendency to torpor, deepening to death, as in the case of a man who goes to sleep in a snowstorm.

So, dear brethren, we come to a very familiar thought—the duty of Christian men and women, systematically and consciously to cultivate for themselves the habit of realising the unseen, living in the presence of the solemn realities yonder. Oh! if we walked through this illusory and passing world of ours with that great white throne and Him who sits upon it ever blazing before us, do you think we would go to sleep then? If we cultivated the sense of belonging to that unseen order of things, and being but lodgers and strangers, passers-by for a night here, should we be able to fall asleep as we do? The man that goes to bed in a hotel, and says, 'I am going away by express train in the middle of the night' does not fall into a very sound sleep. If we realised, as we ought to do, where our affinities are, of what country we are really the citizens, to whom we belong, and where the things are that really are, then we should find it hard to be slothful and easy to march strenuously on the road that God marks out for us. Cultivate the habit of consciously realising that you are strangers and sojourners here, and 'declare plainly that you seek a country,' and seek it, not as those who may, perchance, not succeed in their quest, seek it, not as those do who are looking for a thing that is lost, and perhaps will never be found, but seek it, as, indeed, the original plainly expresses, as those to whom that land of their search is the land of their nativity to which they belong, their fatherland, the mother-country of them all.

So let us cultivate not only the habit of thus realising the unseen, but of living in the conscious possession, even now, of the great things that God has promised for us. And let us see to it, dear friends, that that faith holds out with patience, and lasts all the long weary days, as they seem to us according to our poor measure of time, which may yet intervene between the present moment and our reaching home. The look-out man at the bow of the ship, as he gazes out on an empty ocean and sees not a sail nor anything but the long wash of the waves running to and indenting the horizon, gets drowsy. But let a little tip of white show itself away out on the blue, and all his senses are alert in a moment. If we clearly and constantly saw where we are going and what is coming to us, the salvation that is 'being borne' toward us, we should not sleep any more. Therefore, let us give diligence to cultivate the patient faith which will keep us awake.

III. Lastly, note the encouragement to the effort of faith.

'Be ye' imitators of those who through faith and patience—these two graces which yet are one—'inherit the promises.' The writer probably includes among these inheritors the sainted dead of the old Covenant, of whom he says in chapter ii. that they 'died in faith, not having received the promise,' and any of the new Covenant who had passed into the other world. And he declares, by the strong language of my text, which is even stronger in the original by the use of a present participle, the present blessedness of all the departed saints. They do *now* inherit the promises. The metaphor is drawn, consciously or unconsciously, from the old story of Israel's possession of the Promised Land, and so suggests all the ideas of rest, of the wanderings being over, of victory, of peace, of society, of each man having his portion of the great land which belongs to all, which that story naturally brings with it.

And for us there may come the encouragement of looking to those dear ones that have gone before us, knowing that they 'stand in their lot' in the Canaan of God, and that we, too, may stand in ours. And so from the thought of their present blessedness in their present inheritance, we may gather cheer, whilst we struggle and tramp along the wilderness road.

And, again, we may gather encouragement not only from the thought of where and how their wanderings have ended, but from the remembrance of the path that they trod. We have no strange road to walk, but one beaten by holy feet from the beginning, and plain for us too. They have passed along the King's highway, and having passed, and having entered into their rest, they remain as witnesses that it is 'the right way to the city of habitation.'

But we have to look higher than to them, and to take for our encouragement not only the pattern of all the pilgrims that have gone before us, but that of the Lord of the march, the 'Breaker,' who is gone up before us, and 'looking off' from the cloud of witnesses, to 'look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of faith, who trod the road, every step of it, and left footprints not unstained with blood in which we may plant our poor feet, 'having left us an example that we should follow in His steps.'

FLEEING AND CLINGING

'We . . . who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.'
HEB. vi. 18.

THE name of Christian was invented by outsiders. It is very seldom used in the New Testament, and then evidently as a designation by which Christ's followers were known to others; and not as one employed by themselves. They spoke of each other as 'disciples,' 'believers,' 'saints,' 'brethren,' or the like. Sometimes they used more expanded names, of which my text is an example. It sets forth part of the characteristics of those whom the world knew as 'Christians.' Now that the name has been adopted by the Church and has lost a good deal of its original force in many minds, this description may serve to teach what is one essential feature in the description of a Christian. He is one who has 'fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before' him. That strikes a good many off the list, does it not? Not birth, nor baptism, nor acceptance of a creed, nor association with a community makes a Christian, but the personal act of fleeing for his life and grasping the horns of the altar.

I confine myself to the plain, evangelical teaching, the acceptance in heart and life of which makes a man a Christian, whilst nothing else does. I want to ask you all—or, rather, I pray, that my poor words may help you to ask yourselves, and not rest till you have answered the question 'Have *I*, thus, my very own self, fled for refuge to the hope that is set before me?' An old divine said, 'Preachers should preach, not for sharpening wits, but for saving souls.' And that is what I want, God helping me, to try to do.

I. First of all, then, let me put a plain statement, and you will forgive the sharpness of the form in which I put it, because I want it to stick—*You* need a refuge.

There is nothing sadder than the strange power which men have of blinking the great facts of their own condition and of human life. I know few things that seem to me more tragic, and certainly none that are more contemptible, than the easy-going, superficial optimism, or the easy-going superficial negligence, with which hosts of people altogether slur over, even if they do not deny, the plain fact that every man and woman of us stands here in this world, though compassed by many blessings, and in the enjoyment of much good, and having many delights flowing into our lives, and being warranted in laughter and mirth,—still stands like an unsheltered fugitive in the open, with a ring of enemies round about that may close in upon him. Self-interest seems often to be blind, and in many, I am sure, of my hearers, it is blind to the plainest and largest truths with reference to themselves, their necessities, and their conditions. Ah, dear friends! after all that we say about the beauty, and the brightness, and the joyfulness of life, and the beneficence of God, we live in a very stern world. There are evils that may come, and there are some that certainly will come. You young people—thank God for it, but do not abuse it—are buoyant in hope, and take short views, and are glad, where older folk who have learned what life is generally have sober estimates of its possibilities, and our radiant visions have toned down into a very subdued grey. Sorrow, disappointment, broken hopes, hopes fulfilled *and* disappointed—and, that is worst of all—losses, inevitable partings when the giant-shrouded figure of Death forces its way in at the rose-covered portal, in spite of the puny effort of Love to keep it out, sicknesses, failures in business, griefs of many kinds that I cannot touch, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and all the ills that flesh is heir to, these lie waiting somewhere on the road for every one of us. Are you going to stand in the unsheltered plain, a mark for all these? Do you think you can front them in your own strength? Are you able, calmly and soberly, remembering the possibilities that lie in the black clouds over your head, to say, 'Pour on! I will endure?' Nay! verily; you need a refuge.

You carry your own worst danger buttoned up in your own waistcoats and gowns; you bear about with you in your hearts, in your passions, in your desires, a vase of combustibles amidst the sparks of a volcano, so to speak. And any one of these that fill the air may drop into it, and bring about a conflagration. No man that has measured himself, the irritability of his nerves, the excitability of his passions, the weakness of his will, and its ugly trick of going over to the enemy at the very critical moment of the fight, but, if he is a wise man, will say, 'I need something stronger than myself to fall back upon, I need some damp cloth or other to be laid over the magazine of combustibles in my heart. I need a refuge from myself.'

You carry—no matter whence it came, or how it was developed; that is of no consequence, you have got it—you carry a conscience that is not altogether silent in any man, I suppose, and that certainly is not altogether dead in you. Its awful voice speaks many a time in the silence of the night, and in the depth of your own heart, and tells you that there are evil things in your past, and a page black in your biography which you can do nothing to cancel or to erase the stains from, or to tear out. 'What I have written I have written.' And so long as memory holds her place and conscience is not shattered altogether, there needs no other hell to make the punishment of the evil-doer. You need a refuge from the stings of the true indictments of your own consciences.

Your conscience is a prophet. It is not, nowadays, fashionable to preach about the Day of Judgment—more's the pity, I think. We say that every one of us shall give an account of ourselves to God. Have you ever tried to believe that about yourself, and to realise what it means? Think that all, down to the oozy depths that we are ashamed to look at ourselves, will be spread out before the 'pure eyes and perfect judgment of the all-judging' God. O brother! you will need a refuge 'that you may have boldness before Him in the Day of Judgment.' These things that I have been speaking about, external ills, ungoverned self, the accusations of conscience, which is the voice of God, and that future to which we are all driving as fast as we can—these things are *truths.* And, being truths, they should enter in, as operative facts, into your lives. My question is, have they done so?

You need a refuge; have you ever calmly contemplated the necessity? Oh! do not let that dogged ignorance of the facts bewitch you any longer. Do not let the inconsequent levity that cannot see an inch beyond its nose hide from you the realities of our own condition. People in the prisons, during the September massacres of the French Revolution, used to amuse themselves—although the tumbrils were coming for some of them to-morrow morning, and the headsman was waiting for them—used to amuse themselves as if they were free, and got up entertainments with a ghastly mockery of joy. That is something like what some of us do. One has seen a mule going down an Alpine pass, ambling quite comfortably along, with one foot over a precipice, and a thousand feet to fall if it slips. That is how some of us travel along the road. Sheep will nibble the grass, stretching their stupid necks a little bit further to get an especially succulent tuft on the edge of the cliffs, with eight hundred feet and a crawling sea at the bottom of it to receive them if they stumble. Do not be like that. 'Be ye not as the horses or the mules that have no understanding,' but look the facts in the face, and do not be content till you have acted as they prescribe.

II. You have the refuge that you need.

The writer of this Epistle describes it in my text as being 'the hope set before us.' Now, by 'hope' there, he obviously means, not the emotion, but the object upon which it is fixed. For it is something 'set before' him—that is to say, external to him, and on which, when it *is* set before him, he can lay an appropriating hand, so that by the hope here is meant the thing hoped for. That, of course, is a very common usage, in which we transfer the name of a feeling to the thing that excites it. So people talk about such and such a thing being their 'dread.' Or, affection gives its own name to its objects, and speaks about or to them as my love, my joy, my delight, in token of the completeness with which the heart has gone out to, and rests on, the thing which is thus identified, transported, as it were, with the emotion which grasps it. In like manner here it is the thing that Christians have laid hold of which is called 'the hope set before us.'

In the context—that thing set before men as the object of hope is the great and faithful promise of God, confirmed by His oath long ago, to the ancient patriarchs, the promise of divine blessings and of a future inheritance. And, says the writer, away down here, in the very latest ages, we have the very same solid substance to grasp and cling to that Abraham of old had. For God said to him, 'Blessing I will bless thee,' and He says it to us; and that is a 'refuge.' God said to him, 'Thou shalt have a land for an inheritance,' and He says it to us, and that is a refuge. The presence of God, and the promise of a blessed inheritance, are the elements of the hope of which the writer is speaking. Then, in his rapid way, he crowds figure upon figure, and, not content with the two of my text, the asylum and the strong stay, he adds a third, and likens this hope to the anchor of the soul, giving steadfastness and fixity to the man who clings, being in itself 'sure' so that it will not break, and 'steadfast' so that it will not drag. He goes on to say that this object of hope enters 'into that within the veil.' But notice that in the very next verse he speaks of some one else who entered within the veil—viz., Jesus Christ. So, as in a dissolving view, you have, first the figure of Hope, as the poets have painted her, calm and radiant and smiling; and then that form melts away, and there stands instead of the abstraction Hope, the person Jesus Christ. Which, being translated into plain words, is just this, the refuge is Christ, Christ, our hope. Mark, further, how the writer describes our Lord there as our forerunner and priest.

Now that exposition of the context opens out into important thoughts. Jesus Christ is our hope and refuge, because He is our priest. Ah, dear brethren! all other enemies and ills are tolerable, and a man may make shift to bear them all without God, though he will bear them very imperfectly, but the deepest need of all, the most threatening enemy of all, can only be dealt with and overcome by the gospel which proclaims the priest whose death is the abolition of death, whose sacrifice is the removal of sin, who 'has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, and by whose stripes we are healed.' I pray you to recognise this fact, that there is no other way by which Christ can be a refuge and the hope of the world, than by His first dealing triumphantly with the fact of sin, which is the tap-root of all sorrows. It is because that dear Lord has died for every one of us, because in Him we have 'redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins'; because, with Him on our side, we need not fear the accusations of conscience, nor have a fearful looking for of judgment, that He, and He only, is the refuge for the whole of this sinful world. Is He *your* refuge?

and do you know Him as your priest? The acceptance and sufficiency of His sacrifice is witnessed by the fact that He has entered within the veil, and because thus He has entered He is for us our only hope, our all-sufficient refuge.

I need not remind you, I suppose, too, how utterly different all the inevitable ills and sorrows of this mortal life become when we lay hold on Him, and find shelter there. 'A man shall be a refuge from the storm and a covert from the tempest, as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.' We can bear sickness, and sorrows, and disappointments and failures and partings and all grief, and the arrow-heads are blunted, or, at all events, the poison is wiped off the barbs when we have Christ for our refuge and our friend.

And because He is our forerunner, and has passed within the veil, as the context says so impressively, 'for us,' we are emancipated, further, from the fear of death; and the dread of what lies beyond, and are emboldened to lift even eyes that weep tears of penitence and a face that is suffused with the blush of conscious unworthiness; and to behold within the veil the pledge of our entrance there in the person of Jesus Christ. So, brethren, for all the ills that flesh can bear, for all that sin entails, for the gnawings of our own conscience, and for the judgments of future retribution, we can betake ourselves to that Saviour and say with quiet confidence, 'I have made the Lord my refuge, no evil shall befall me, nor any plague come nigh my dwelling.'

III. Lastly, I have said, you need a refuge. You have the refuge you need. Let me put my last word into, not a command, but an entreaty—flee to it.

The writer, as I have occasion to remark, blends two vivid metaphors here, the one of a fugitive unsheltered in the open, surrounded by foes, the other of a man grasping some strong stay. Look at the two pictures.

'Fled for refuge.' There probably is an allusion here to the Israelitish institution of the cities of refuge for the manslayer. But whether there be or not, the scene brought before us is that of a man flying for his life with the pursuer clattering at his heels, and his lance-point within a yard of the fugitive's back. Grass will not grow under that man's feet; he will not stop to look at the flowers by the road. The wealth of South Africa, if it were spread before him, would not check his headlong flight. It is a race for life. If he gets to the open gate he is safe. If he is overtaken before he reaches it he is a dead man. The moment he gets within the portal the majesty of law compasses him about, and delivers him from the wild justice of revenge. Surely, the urgency of flight and the folly of the hesitation and delay that mark some of us are vividly brought out by the metaphor. 'By and by,' kills its tens of thousands. For one man that says, 'I am not a Christian, and, what is more, I never intend to be,' there are a dozen that say, 'To-morrow! to-morrow!' 'Let me sow my wild oats as a young man; let me alone for a little while. I am busy at present; when I have a convenient season I will send for Thee.' What would have become of the man-slayer if he had curled himself up in his cloak, and lain down beside his victim, and said, 'I am too tired to run for it?' He would have been dead before morning.

A rabbi's scholar, as the Jewish traditions tell us, once said to him, 'Master! when shall I repent?' 'The day before you die,' said the Rabbi. The scholar said, 'I may die to-day.' Then said the Rabbi, 'Repent to-day.' 'Choose you this day' whether you will stand unsheltered out there, exposed to the pelting hustling of the pitiless storm, or will flee to the refuge and be saved.

Look at the other picture, 'to lay hold of the hope.' Perhaps the allusion is to the old institution of sanctuary, which perhaps existed in Israel, and at any rate was well known in ancient times. When a man grasped the horns of the altar he was safe. If so, the two metaphors may really blend into one; the flight first, and then the clutching to that which, so long as the twining fingers could encompass it, would permit no foe to strike the fugitive. This metaphor speaks of the fixity of the hold with which we should grasp Jesus Christ by our faith. The shipwrecked sailor up in the rigging, with the wild sea around him, and the vessel thumping upon the sand, will hold on, with frozen fingers, for hours, to the shrouds, knowing that if he slips his grasp the next hungry wave will sweep him away and devour him. And so you should cling to Jesus Christ, with the consciousness of danger and helplessness, with the tight grasp of despair, with the tight grasp of certain hope. Brother! have you fled; do you grasp?

I remember reading of an inundation in India, when a dam, away up in a mountain gorge, burst at midnight. Mounted messengers were sent down the glen to gallop as hard as they could, and rouse the sleeping villagers. Those who rose and fled in an instant were in time to reach the high ground, as they saw the tawny flood coming swirling down the gorge, laden with the wrecks of happy homes and many a corpse. Those who hesitated and dawdled were swept away by it. My message to you, dear friends, is, 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain. Escape to the mountains lest thou be consumed.'

THE ANCHOR OF THE SOUL

'Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.'—HEB. vi. 19.

THERE is something very remarkable in the prominence given by Christianity to hope as an element in the perfect character. The New Testament is, one may say, full of exhortations to 'hope perfectly.' It is regarded as one of the three virtues which sum up all Christian goodness. Nay! In one place the Apostle Paul lays upon it the whole weight of our salvation, for he says 'we are saved by hope.'

Now this great prominence given to the exercise of this faculty seems to correspond with the will of God as expressed in our nature, for man is a creature obstinate in his hope. But it seems to be strangely at variance with the value of hope as attested by experience; for who does not know that most hopes are false; and that whether they be disappointed or fulfilled, they betray.

The world is full of complaints of the fallacies of hope. Poets and moralists are sure of a response when they touch that chord; and it sometimes seems to us as if elaborate provision were made in our nature for deluding us into activity and tempting us along toilsome paths, to gather a handful of mist at the end, and then to say in our bitterness, 'All is vanity and vexation of spirit.'

But yet 'God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them'; and if there be in a man a faculty so obstinate and strong as this, there must be somewhere a reality which it can grasp; and, grasping, can be freed from all its miseries and mistakes.

So my text tells us where that is, and tells us further how ennobling and steady an ally of all great and blessed things hope is in a man, when it is rightly fixed on the right objects. The metaphor of my text is unique in Scripture, though it be common in other places. Only here do we find the familiar thought that hope is 'the anchor of the soul.' I take that metaphor as the guiding thought in my words now; and ask you to consider the anchor; the anchorage, or holding-ground; the cable; and the steadfastness of the ship so anchored in all storms.

I. Consider, then, first, the force of this metaphor of the anchor.

Now it seems to me that the very figure requires us to suppose that hope here means, not the emotion but the object on which it is fixed. The same interpretation is necessarily suggested by the context; for the previous verse speaks about 'a hope *set before* us,' and about our '*laying hold* upon it.' So that here, at all events, the hope is something external to ourselves which is proposed to us, and which we can grasp.

An anchor is outside the ship; and that which steadies us cannot be a part of ourselves, must be something external to us, on which our fluttering and mutable emotions can repose and be still.

Nor is it at all unusual, either in Scripture or in common speech, that we should employ the name of the emotion to express the object which the emotion grasps. For instance, people say to one another, 'my love,' 'my comfort,' and we talk about God as 'our fear' and 'our dread,' and Scripture speaks of Christ as our hope; in all which phrases the person who excites the emotion is described by the name of the emotion.

And so, I take it, is the case here. The hope which we possess, and which, outside of us, we being fastened to it, makes us steadfast and secure, is, at bottom, Jesus Christ Himself. This hope, says my text, 'has entered within the veil.' Well! read on. 'Whither the Forerunner is for us entered.' When He passed within the veil our hope passed within it, and went with Him. For He is not only the foundation, but He is the substance of our hope. He is the thing hoped for, and in the deepest interpretation, all our future is the personal Christ; and every blessed anticipation that can fill a human heart with gladness is summed up in this, 'that I may be found in Him,' and made partaker of that Saviour whom to possess is fruition and eternal life. He is the anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and entering within the veil.

Notice further the characteristics ascribed to this anchor and hope. 'Sure and steadfast.' These two words express diverse qualities of the hope. A sure anchor is one which does not drag. It is not too light for the ship that rides by it. It has found a firm ground, its flukes are all right, and it holds. It does not deceive. The ship's crew may trust to it.

An anchor which is steadfast, or, as the original word might be rendered, 'firm,' is one that will not break, but is strong in its own substance, made of good tough iron, so that there is no fear of the shank snapping, whatever strain may be put upon it. We may then say, generally, that this object of the Christian hope is free from all the weaknesses and imperfections which cleave and cling to other objects. Take just a sentence or two in illustration of that.

Our earthly hopes, what are they? Only the products of our own imaginations, or the reflection of our wishes projected on the dim screen of the future, with no more substance in them than the shadows from a magic-lantern thrown on to the sheet. Or even if they be the reasonable result of calculation, they still have no existence. But there, says my text, is a hope which is a real thing, and has a present existence. It has 'entered into that within the veil,' as the literal anchor is dropped through the depths of the sea and lost to sight, so by an incongruous and yet forcible blending of metaphor the text tells us this anchor is carried aloft, into the azure depths, and there lost to sight, is fastened as it were to the very throne of God. All the universe being the temple, and a thin veil being stretched between us in the outer court and that Holy of Holies, the Christ, who is our hope, has passed within the veil, and is verily there, separated from us and yet close by us. A veil is but a thin partition. We can hear the voices on the other side of a woollen curtain, we can catch the gleams of light through it. A touch will draw it aside. So we float in the midst of that solemn unseen present which is to us the future; and all the brightest and grandest objects of the Christian man's anticipation have a present existence and are real; just on the other side of that thin curtain that parts us from them. A touch, and it rattles on its rings and we stand in the blaze of the fruition. This hope is not an imagination, not the projection of wishes upon the dim curtain of the future, not the child of calculation, but a present reality within arm's length of us all.

Then, again, earthly hopes are less than certainties. This one is a certainty, We may make the future as sure as the past. Hope may be as veracious as memory. It is not so with our ordinary anticipations; we all feel that when we say we hope we are admitting an element of dread as well as of hope into our anticipations. And so, however hope may smile there is always a touch of terror in her sweet eyes. As one of our great poets has described her, she carries a jewelled cup of richest wine, but coiled at the bottom of it a sleeping serpent. Possibilities that it may be otherwise are an integral part of all the uncertain hopes of earth, make it a torture often, and always dim its lustre and its gladness.

But certitude is a characteristic of the Christian hope. It is 'sure,' as my text has it, and we can say, not, 'I trust it may,' but, 'I know it will.' Is it not something to be able to look forward into the dim unknown, and to feel that whilst much there is mercifully hidden, far more and that the best in the future is manifest as history, and certain as the fixed past. To the Christian resting upon Christ it is no presumption, but the simplest duty to feel 'to-morrow,' and the to-morrow after that, and all the to-morrows, including the unsetting day of eternity 'shall be as yesterday, and much more abundant.'

Then again, earthly hopes, whether disappointed or fulfilled, betray, or rather, I might say, are disappointed even whilst they are fulfilled. We paint the future as if it contained but the one thing on which for the time being we have set our hopes. And we do not remember that when we reach the accomplishment of the expectation, life will have a great many other things in it than the fulfilled expectation, and all the old commonplaces, and annoyances, and imperfections will still be there. So ever, the thing chased is more than the thing won. Like some bit of sea-weed, as long as it lies there in the ocean moving its filmy fronds to the wave, it expands and is lovely. Grasp it, and draw it out, and it is a bit of ugly slime in your hand. So possession never realises the dream of hope.

But here, the half hath not been told us. 'Eye hath not seen it, . . . neither hath entered into the heart of man,' in his loftiest anticipations, the transcendent realisation of the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him.

II. And now turn to the other points in this text. Look at the anchorage, or holding-ground, that is to say, the reasons or the grounds on which these great objects become objects of hope to us.

Why is it that I may without presumption, and that I must, unless I would fall beneath my obligations, expect to be for ever like Jesus Christ? Why, here is the anchorage. 'God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation.' Or, to put it into other words, God's solemn utterance of His will guaranteed to us by God's putting all the majesty of His own being into pawn for the fulfilment of His promise is the ground on which we rest. There is the anchorage. Nothing can touch that. If we cleave to Jesus Christ we have anchored ourselves in the fastnesses of the divine nature. We have struck the roots of our hopes deep into the very being of God; and all that is majestic, all that is omnipotent, all that is tender, all that is immutable in Him goes to confirm to my poor heart the astounding expectation that whatsoever Christ is I shall become, and that wheresoever Christ is there will also His servant be. Oh! how this rock-foundation on which we may build makes all the other foundations upon which men rest their ruinable hopes seem wretched and transitory. Cursed be the man—and he is cursed, that is, wretched and miserable in the act—'Cursed be the man that maketh flesh his arm, and whose hope is in man. Blessed be the man whose hope is in the Lord his God, and whose trust the Lord is.' This anchorage is safe in all weathers, and none that ever sheltered there have been driven on the iron-bound leeward rocks.

III. Again, still keeping the metaphor of the text, notice the cable.

The anchor is of no use unless it be fastened by a strong hawser or chain. All the faithfulness of the divine nature, and all the grandeur of the promises which Christ gives and is, are naught to us unless we attach ourselves to them by setting our hopes there. I have been speaking to you about the vanity, the disappointing misery of earthly hope. These show that the obstinate faculty which, in spite of them all, persists is as plainly meant to be attached to Jesus Christ as the great iron chain that you see lying on the deck is obviously intended to be the anchor-chain. You are able to anticipate the future, and God has given you the ability in order that it may grapple you to your Lord and Master, by whom alone you will be lords of the future, and it be filled with peace. To do that, to attach yourselves thus to Jesus Christ by a persistent and triumphant hope is not an easy thing.

It means, first of all, detachment. You must get away from these lower and earthly anticipations of the paltry and immediate future on this side the grave, which fill so much of your onward gaze, if your eye is to see clearly that nobler future further ahead which is its legitimate and its only object. The habit of Christian hope needs diligent cultivation and strenuous effort. I think that there are few things that Christian men and women need to be exhorted to more earnestly than this that they should not waste upon the mean anticipations of to-morrow that wonderful faculty by which they may knit themselves to the most glorious and blessed realities in the remotest future. The wings of hope were given, not that we might flutter near the earth, but that we might rise to God. The clear eye that looks before was given us not that we should limit our vision to the near, but that we might send it forward to the most distant horizon. Do not let yourselves be so absorbed by anticipations of what you are going to do and where you are going to be to-morrow that you have no leisure to think of what you are going to do and where you are going to be through the eternities. We run our eyes along the low levels of earth, and we too seldom lift them to the great white summits that ring round the little plain on which our day is passed. Christian men and women, you are saved by hope. Live in the continual contemplation of that blessed future, and Him who makes it; and, according to the old exhortation *sursum corda*, 'up with your hearts' and your hopes, and fasten them to the anchor of your souls which hath entered within the veil.

IV. And now, lastly, a word as to the steadfastness of the ship that rides in any storm by this anchor.

Hope is not usually a masculine faculty, nor one that on the whole is the ally of the stronger and nobler virtues. It does no doubt impel to action, and he that has ceased to hope has ceased to strive; but also, and quite as often, its effect is to disturb and flutter rather than to steady, to make impatient, to unfit for persistent application and toilsome service, to set the blood dancing through the veins, so that the hand can scarcely be kept steady. But this Christian hope, if we rightly take the measure of it, and understand it, is an ally of all great, steadfast, calm, patient virtue.

For one thing it will put all the present in its true subordination. Just as when a man's eye is fixed upon the reddening dawn of the morning sky, all the trees and objects between him and it are toned down into one uniform blackness, so when we have that great light shining beyond the earthly horizon all the colours of the objects between us and it will be less garish, and they will dwindle into comparative insignificance. It is not so hard to bear sorrow when the light of a great hope makes the endurance but for a little moment, and the exceeding and eternal weight of glory more conspicuous than it. It is not so hard to do duty when a great hope makes action for the time sublime, and makes difficulties dwindle and hardships sweet. It is not so hard to resist temptations when temptations have had their dazzling light dimmed by the greater brightness of the hope revealed.

He that has anchored himself to Christ may be calm in sorrow and triumphant over temptation. Whatsoever winds may blow he may ride safe there, and however frowning may be the iron-bound rocks a cable's length off, if he has cast out his anchor at the stern he may quietly wait for the day in the assurance that no shipwreck is possible for him. Your hope will be the ally of all, dignity, patience, victory, will steady the soul and make it participant, in some measure, of its own steadfastness and security.

And just as sailors sometimes send the anchor ahead that they may have a fixed point towards which to warp themselves, so, if our anchor is that Christ who has passed into the heavens, He will draw us, in due time, whither He Himself has gone. A calm steady hope fixed upon the enthroned Christ, our fore-runner, and the pattern of what we shall be if we trust Him, will make us steadfast and victorious in all our sorrows, burdens, changes, and temptations. Without it life is indeed as 'futile then as frail,' and our only 'hope of answer' to its torturing problems, or of 'redress' of its manifold pains is 'behind the veil, behind the veil.' Such a hope knits us to the true stay of our souls, and is a cord not easily broken. As for men's hopes fixed on earth, they are fragile and filmy as the spiders' webs, which, in early autumn mornings, twinkle dewy in every copse, and are gone by midday.

My brother! you have this great faculty; what do you do with it, and where do you fix it? You have a personal concern in that future, whether you think about it and like it or not. What is your hope for that future, and what is the ground of your hope? Let me beseech you, fasten the little vessel of your life to that great anchor, Christ, who has died, and who lives for you. And then, though the thread between you and Him be but slender and fragile, it will not be a dead cable, but a living nerve, along which His own steadfast life will pour, making you steadfast like Himself, and at last fulfilling and transcending your highest hopes in eternal fruition of His own blessedness.

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

HEBREWS

Chaps. VII to End

EPISTLE OF JAMES

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RIGHTEOUSNESS FIRST, PEACE SECOND

'First being, by interpretation, King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace.'—HEB. vii. 2.

THAT mysterious, shadowy figure of the priest-king Melchizedec has been singularly illuminated and solidified by recent discovery. You can see now in Berlin and London, letters written fourteen centuries before Christ, by a king of Jerusalem who describes himself almost in the very words which the Old and the New Testaments apply to Melchizedec. He says that he is a royal priest or a priestly king. He says that he derived his royalty neither from father nor mother, nor by genealogical descent; and he says that he owes it to 'the great King'—possibly an equivalent to the 'Most High God'; of whom Melchizedec is in Scripture said to have been a worshipper. The name of the letter-writer is not Melchizedec, but the fact that his royalty was not hereditary, like a Pharaoh's, may explain how each monarch bore his own personal appellation, and not one common to successive members of a dynasty.

And are not the names of King and city significant —'King of righteousness . . . King of peace'? It sounds like a yearning, springing up untimely in those dim ages of oppression and strife, for a royalty founded on something better than the sword, and wielded for something higher than personal ambition. Such an ideal at such a date is like a summer day that has wandered into a cold March.

But the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews imposes a meaning not only on the titles, but on their sequence.

Of course therein he is letting a sanctified imagination play round a fact, and giving to it a meaning which is not in it. None the less in that emphatic expression '*first* King of righteousness, and *after that* also King of peace,' he penetrated very deeply into the heart of Christ's reign and work, and echoed a sentiment that runs all through Scripture. Hearken to one psalmist: 'The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little hills, by righteousness.' Hearken to another: 'Righteousness and peace have kissed each other.' Hearken to a prophet: 'The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever.' Hearken to the most Hebraistic of New Testament writers: 'The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace.' Hearken to the central teaching of the most Evangelical, if I may so say, of New Testament writers: 'Being justified'—made righteous—'by faith, we have peace with God.' So the 'first' and the 'after that' reveal to us the very depth of Christ's work, and carry in them not only important teaching as to that, but equally important directions and guides for Christian conduct; and it is to this aspect of my text, and this only, that I ask your attention now.

The order which we have here, 'first of all King of righteousness, and after that King of peace,' is the order which I shall try to illustrate in two ways. First, in reference to Christ's work on the individual soul; second, in reference to Christ's work on society and communities.

First, then, here we have laid down the sequence in which

I. Christ comes with His operations and His gifts to the soul that clings to Him.

First 'righteousness . . . after . . . peace. Now I need not do more than in a sentence remind you of the basis upon which the thoughts in the text, and all right understanding of Christ's work on an individual, repose, and that is that without righteousness no man can either be at peace with God or with himself. Not with God—for however shallow experience may talk effusively and gushingly about a God who is all mercy, and who loves and takes to His heart the sinner and the saint alike; such a God drapes the universe in darkness, and if there are no moral distinctions which determine whether a man is in amity or hostility with God, then 'the pillared firmament itself is rottenness, and earth's base built on stubble.' No, no, brethren; it sounds very tender and kindly; at bottom it is the cruellest thing that you can say, to say that without righteousness a man can please God. The sun is in the heavens, and whether there be mist and fog down here, or the bluest of summer skies, the sun *is* above. But its rays coming through the ethereal blue are warmth and blessedness, and its rays cut off by mists are dim, and itself turned into a lurid ball of fire. It cannot be—and thank God that it cannot—that it is all the same to Him whether a man is saint or sinner.

I do not need to remind you that in like manner righteousness must underlie peace with oneself. For it is true to-day, as it was long generations ago, according to the prophet, that 'the wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters throw up mire and dirt,' and, on the other hand, the promise is true still and for ever; 'O that thou hadst hearkened unto me, then had thy peace been like a river,' because 'thy righteousness' will be 'like the waves of the sea.' For ever and ever it stands true that for peace with God, and for a quiet heart, and a nature at harmony with itself, there must be righteousness.

Well, then, Jesus Christ comes to bring to a man the righteousness without which there can be no peace in his life. And that is the meaning of the great word which, having been taken for a shibboleth and 'test of a falling or a standing Church,' has been far too much ossified into a mere theological dogma, and has been weakened and misunderstood in the process. Justification by faith; that is the battle-cry of Protestant communities. And what does it mean? That I shall be treated as righteous, not being so? That I shall be forgiven and acquitted? Yes, thank God! But is that all that it means, or is that the main thing that it means? No, thank God! for the very heart of the Christian doctrine of righteousness is this, that if, and as soon as, a man puts his trembling trust in Jesus Christ as his Saviour, then he receives not merely pardon, which is the uninterrupted flow of the divine love in spite of his sin, nor an accrediting him with a righteousness which does not belong to him, but an imparting to him of that new life, a spark from the central fire of Christ's life, 'the new man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Do not suppose that the great message of the gospel is merely forgiveness. Do not suppose that its blessed gift is only that a man is acquitted because Christ has died. All that is true. But there is something more than that which is the basis of that other, and that is that by faith in Jesus Christ, I am so knit to Him—'He that is joined to the Lord' being 'one spirit'—as that there passes into me, by His gift, a life which is created after His life, and is in fact cognate and kindred with it.

No doubt it is a mere germ, no doubt it needs cultivating, development, carefully guarding against gnawing insects and blighting frosts. But the seed which is implanted, though it be less than the least of all seeds, has in itself the promise and the potency of triumphant growth, when it will tower above all the poisonous shrubs and undergrowth of the forest, and have the light of heaven resting on its aspiring top. Here is the great blessing and distinctive characteristic of Christian morality, that it does not say to a man: 'First aim after good deeds and so grow up into goodness,' but it starts with a gift, and says, 'Work from that, and by the power of that. "I make the tree good,"' says Jesus to us, 'do you see to it that the fruit is good.' No doubt the vegetable metaphor is inadequate, because the leaf is wooed from out the bud, and 'grows green and broad, and takes no care,' but that effortless growth is not how righteousness increases in men. The germ is given them, and they have to cultivate it. First, there must be the impartation of righteousness, and then there comes to the man's heart the sweet assurance of peace with God, and he has within him 'a conscience like a sea at rest, imaginations calm and fair.' 'First, King of righteousness; after that, King of peace.'

Now if we keep firm hold of this sequence, a great many of the popular objections to the gospel, as if it were merely a means of forgiveness and escape, and a system of reconciliation by some kind of forensic expedient, fall away of themselves, and a great many of the popular blunders that Christian people make fall away too. For there are good folks to whom the great truth that 'God is in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing to them their trespasses,' and welcoming them to all the fulness of an overflowing love, has obscured the other truth that there is no peace for a Christian man continuous through his life, unless equally continuous through his life are his efforts to work out in acts the new nature which he has received.

Thus my text, by the order in which it places righteousness and peace, not only illuminates the work of Christ upon each individual soul, but comes with a very weighty and clear direction to Christian people as to their course of conduct. Are you looking for comfort? Is what you want to get out of your religion mainly the assurance that you will not go to hell? Is the great blessing that Christ brings to you only the blessing of pardon, which you degrade to mean immunity from punishment? You are wrong. 'First of all, King of righteousness'—let that which is first of all in His gifts be first of all in your efforts too; and do not seek so much for comfort as for grace to know and to do your duty, and strength to 'cast off the unfruitful works of darkness,' and to 'put on the armour of light.' The order which is laid down in my text was laid down with a different application, by our Lord Himself, and ought to be in both forms the motto for all Christian people. 'Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things'—comfort, sense of reconciliation, assurance of forgiveness, joyful hope, and the like, as well as needful material good—'shall be added unto you.'

And now, secondly, my text gives the order of

II. Christ's work in the world, and of His servant's work after Him.

Of course, our Lord's work in the world is simply the aggregate of His work on individual souls. But for the sake of clearness we may consider these two aspects of it somewhat apart. In regard to this second part of my subject, I would begin, as I began in the former section, by reminding you that the only basis on which harmonious relations between men in communities, great or small, can be built, is righteousness, in the narrowest sense of the word, meaning thereby justice, equal dealing as between man and man, without partiality or class favouritism. Wherever you get an unjustly treated section or order of men, there you get the beginnings of war and strife. A social order built upon injustice, just in the measure in which it is so built, is based upon a quicksand which will suck it down, or on a volcano which will blow it to pieces. Injustice is the grit in the machine; you may oil it as much as you like with philanthropy and benevolence, but until you get the grit out, it will not work smoothly. There is no harmony amongst men unless their association is based and bottomed upon righteousness.

Jesus Christ comes into the world to bring peace at the far end, but righteousness at the near end, and therefore strife. The herald angels sang peace upon earth. They were looking to the deepest and ultimate issues of His mission, but when He contemplated its immediate results He had to say, 'Suppose ye that I bring peace on earth? I tell you nay, but rather division.' He rode into Jerusalem 'the King, meek, and having salvation,' throned upon the beast of burden which symbolised peace. But He will come forth in the last fight, as He has been coming forth through all the ages, mounted on the white horse, with the sword girt upon His thigh in behalf of meekness and righteousness and truth. Christ, and Christianity when it keeps close to Christ, is a ferment, not an emollient. The full and honest application of Christ's teaching and principles to any society on the face of the earth at this day is bound to result in agitation and strife. There is no help for it. When a pure jet of water is discharged into a foul ditch, there will be much uprising of mud. Effervescence will always follow when Christ's principles are applied to existing institutions. And so it comes to pass that Christian men, in the measure in which they are true to their Master, turn the world upside down. There will follow, of course, the tranquillity that does follow on righteousness; but that is far ahead, and there is many a weary mile to be trod, and many a sore struggle to be undertaken, before the kingdoms of this world become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and strife ends for ever.

Now, if this be so, then in this necessary characteristic of Christ's operation on the world, viz., disturbance arising from the endeavour to enthrone righteousness where its opposite has ruled — there results very plainly important teaching as to the duties of Christ's servants to take their full share in the fight, to be the knights of the Holy Ghost, the champions of righteousness. The Church ought to lead in the van of all assaults on hoary wrongs or modern forms of unrighteousness in municipal, political, national life. And it is the disgrace of the Church that so largely it leaves that contest to be waged by men who make no pretence to be Christians.

There is, unfortunately, a type of Christian thinking and life, of which in many respects one would speak with all sympathy and admiration, which warns the Christian Church against casting itself into this contest, in the alleged interest of a superior spirituality and a loftier conception of Evangelical truth. I believe, as heartily as any man can—and I venture to appeal to those who hear me Sunday by Sunday, and from year to year, whether it is not so—that the preaching of Jesus Christ is the cure for all the world's miseries, and the banishment of all the world's unrighteousness; but am I to be told that the endeavour to apply the person and the principles of Jesus Christ, in His life and death, to existing institutions and evils, is *not* preaching Christ? I believe that it is, and that the one thing that the Church wants to-day is not less of holding up the Cross and the Sacrifice, but more of pointing to the Cross and the Sacrifice as the cure of all the world's evils, and the pattern for all righteousness.

It is difficult to do, it is made difficult by our own desire to be what the prophet did not think a very reputable position, 'at ease in Zion.' It is also made difficult by the way in which, as is most natural, the world, meaning thereby godless, organised society, regards an active Church that desires to bring *its* practices to the test of Christ's word. Muzzled watch-dogs that can neither bark nor bite are much admired by burglars. And a Church that confines itself to theory, to what it calls religion, and leaves the world to go to the devil as it likes, suits both the world and the devil. There was once a Prime Minister of England who came out of church one Sunday morning in a state of towering indignation because the clergyman had spoken about conduct. And that is exactly how the world feels about an intrusive Church that *will* push its finger into all social arrangements, and say about each of them, 'This must be *as* Christ commanded.'

Brethren! would God that all Christian men deserved the name of 'troublers of Israel.' There was once a prophet to whom the men of his day indignantly said, 'O sword of the Lord, how long will it be ere thou be quiet? Put up thyself in thy scabbard, rest and be still.' And the answer was the only possible one, 'How can it be quiet, seeing that the Lord hath appointed it?' If you and I are Christ's servants, we shall follow the sequence of His operations, and seek to establish righteousness first and then peace.

The true Salem is above.

> 'My soul, there is a country
> Afar beyond the stars.'

There 'sweet peace sits crowned with smiles.' The swords will then be wreathed with laurel and men 'shall learn war no more,' for the King has fought the great fight, 'and of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end . . . in righteousness and justice, from henceforth even for ever.' Let us take Him for 'the Lord our righteousness,' and we shall blessedly find that 'this Man is our peace.' Let us take arms in the Holy War which He wages, and we shall have peace in our hearts whilst the fight is sorest. Let us labour to 'be found in Him . . . having the righteousness which is of God by faith,' and then we shall 'be found in Him in peace, without spot, blameless.'

THE PRIEST WHOM WE NEED

'Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.'—HEB. vii. 26.

'IT *became* Him to make the Captain of our salvation perfect through sufferings.' 'In all things it *behoved*

Him to be made like unto His brethren.' 'Such an High Priest *became* us.' In these three sayings of this Epistle the historical facts of the gospel are considered as corresponding to or in accordance and congruity with, respectively, the divine nature; Christ's character and purpose; and man's need. I have considered the two former texts in previous sermons, and now I desire to deal with this latter. It asserts that Jesus Christ, regarded as the High Priest, meets the deepest wants of every heart, and fits human necessity as the glove does the hand. He is the answer to all our questions, the satisfaction of all our wants, the bread for our hunger, the light for our darkness, the strength for our weakness, the medicine for our sickness, the life for our death. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

But the other side is quite as true. Christianity is in full accordance with men's wants, Christianity is in sharp antagonism with a great deal which men suppose to be their wants. Men's wishes, desires, readings of their necessities and conceptions of what is in accordance with the divine nature, are not to be taken without more ado as being the guides of what a revelation from God ought to be. The two characteristics of correspondence and opposition must both unite, in all that comes to us certified as being from God. There is an 'offence of the Cross'; and Christ, for all His correspondence with the deepest necessities of human nature, and I might even say just by reason of that correspondence, will be 'to the Jews a stumbling-block and to the Greeks foolishness.' If a message professing to be from God had not the discord between man's expectations and its facts, a message so like a man's would bear upon its front the evidence that it was of man. If a message professing to be from God had not the correspondence with man's deepest wants, a message so unlike men would bear upon its front the evidence that it was not of God.

So then, remembering the necessary complementary thought to this of my text that 'such a high priest became us,' there are two or three considerations springing from the words that I desire to suggest.

I. The first of them is this—we all need a priest, and we have the priest we need in Jesus Christ.

The outstanding fact in reference to human nature in this connection is that it is a sinful nature. We have all departed from the path of rectitude and have nourished desires and tastes and purposes which do not rend us apart from God, and between us and Him do interpose a great barrier. Our consciences need a priest, or rather they say 'Amen' to the necessity born of our sins, that there shall stand between us and God 'a great High Priest.' I need not elaborate or enlarge upon this matter. The necessity of Christ's sacerdotal character, and the adaptation of that character to men's deepest wants, are not only to be argued about, but we have to appeal to men's consciences, and try to waken them to an adequate and profound sense of the reality and significance of the fact of transgression. If once a man comes to feel, what is true about him, that he is in God's sight a sinful man; to regard that fact in all its breadth, in all its consequences, in all its depth, there will not want any more arguing to make him see that a gospel which deals primarily with the fact of sin, and proclaims a priest whose great work is to offer a sacrifice, is the gospel that he needs.

In fair weather, when the summer seas are sunny and smooth, and all the winds are sleeping in their caves, the life-belts on the deck of a steamer may be thought to be unnecessary, but when she strikes on the black-toothed rocks, and all about is a hell of noise and despair, then the meaning of them is understood. When you are amongst the breakers you will need a life-buoy. When the flames are flickering round you, you will understand the use and worth of a fire-escape, and when you have learned what sort of a man you are, and what that involves in regard of your relations to God, then the mysteries which surround the thought of the high priesthood and sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be accepted as mysteries, and left where they are, and the fact will be grasped with all the tendrils of your soul as the one hope for you in life and in death.

I do not care to argue a man out of his imperfect apprehensions, if he have them, of the mission and work of Jesus Christ. But oh, dear friends! you for whose blood I am in some sense responsible, let me plead with you this one thought—you have not taken the point of view from which to judge of the gospel until you have stood in the perfect rectitude of heaven and contrasted your blackness with its stainless purity, and its solemn requirements; and have looked all round the horizon to see if anywhere there is a means by which a sinful soul can be liberated from the dragon's sting of conscience, and from the crushing burden of guilt, and set upon a rock, emancipated and cleansed. We need a priest because we are sinful men, and sin means separation in fact and alienation in spirit, and the entail of dreadful consequences, which, as far as Nature is concerned, cannot be prevented from coming. And so sin means that if men are to be brought again into the fellowship and the family of God, it must be through One who, being a true priest, offers a real sacrifice for the sins of the whole world.

The new science of comparative religion has been made by some of its adepts to bear witness unfavourably to the claims of Christianity. A far truer use of it would be this—Wherever men have worshipped, they have worshipped at an altar, there has been on it a sacrifice offered by a purged hand that symbolised moral purity. And all these are witnesses that humanity recognises the necessity which my text affirms has been met in Christ. Some people would say 'Yes! and your doctrine of a Christ who is sacrifice and priest, has precisely the same origin as those altars, many smoking with sacrifices to tyrannical gods.' But to me the relation between the faiths of the world and the gospel of Christ, in reference to this matter, is much rather this, that they proclaim a want, and that Christ brings the satisfaction of it; that they with one voice cry, 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him! How shall a man be just with God?' and that the Cross of Christ answers their longings, and offers the means by which we may draw nigh to God. 'Such a High Priest became us.'

II. We may take another consideration from these words, viz.—We need for a priest a perfect man, and we have the perfect priest whom we need, in Jesus Christ.

The writer goes on to enumerate a series of qualities by which our Lord is constituted the priest we need. Of these five qualities which follow in my text, the three former are those to which I now refer. 'He is holy, harmless, undefiled.'

Now I do not need to spend time in discussing the precise meaning of these words, but a remark or two about each of them may perhaps be admissible. Taken generally, these three characteristics refer to the priest's relation to God, to other men, and to the law of purity. 'He is holy'; that is to say, not so much morally free from guilt as standing in a certain relation to God. The word here used for 'holy' has a special meaning. It is the representative of an old Testament word, which seems to mean 'Devoted to God in love.' And it expresses not merely the fact of consecration. but the motive and the means of that consecration, as being the result of God's love or mercy which kindles self-surrendering love in the recipient. Such is the first qualification for a priest, that he shall be knit to God by loving devotion, and have a heart throbbing in unison with the divine heart in all its tenderness of pity and in all its nobleness and loftiness of purity.

And, besides being thus the earthly echo and representative of the whole sweetness of the divine nature, so, in the next place, the priest we need must, in relation to men, be harmless—without malice, guile, unkindness; a Lamb of God, with neither horns to butt, nor teeth to tear, nor claws to wound, but gentle and gracious, sweet and compassionate; or, as we read in another place in this same letter, 'a merciful High Priest in things pertaining to God.' And the priest that we need to bridge over the gulf between us sinful and alienated men and God, must not only be one knit to God in all sympathy, and representing His purity and tenderness amongst us; nor must the priest that we need by reason of our miseries, our sorrows, our weaknesses, our bleeding wounds, our broken hearts, be only a priest filled with compassion and merciful, who can lay a gentle hand upon our sore and sensitive spirits, but the priest that we men, spattered and befouled with the mire and filth of sin, which has left deep stains upon our whole nature, need, must be one 'undefiled,' on whose white garments there shall be no speck; on the virgin purity of whose nature there shall be no stain; who shall stand above us, though He be one of us, and whilst 'it behoves Him to be made in all points like unto His brethren,' shall yet be 'without blemish and without spot.'

'It behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren.' The priest of the world must be like the world. My text says, 'Yes! and He must be absolutely unlike the world.' Now, is this not a strange thing—this is a disgression, but it may be allowed for one moment—is it not a strange thing that in these four little tracts which we call gospels, that might all be printed upon two sides of a penny newspaper, you get drawn, with such few strokes, a picture which harmonises, in a possible person, these two opposite requirements, the absolute unlikeness and the perfect likeness? Think of how difficult it would be if it was not a copy from life, to draw a figure with these two characteristics harmonised. What geniuses the men must have been that wrote the gospels, if they were not something much simpler than that, honest witnesses who told exactly what they saw! The fact that the life and death of Jesus Christ, as recorded in Scripture, present this strange combination of two opposite requirements in the most perfect harmony and beauty, is in my eyes no contemptible proof of the historical veracity of the picture which is presented to us. If the life was not lived I, for one, do not believe that it ever could have been invented.

But that, as I said, has nothing to do with my present subject. And so I pass on just to notice, in a word, how this assemblage of qualifications which, taken together, make up the idea of a perfect man, is found in Jesus Christ for a certain purpose, and a purpose beyond that which some of you, I am afraid, are accustomed to regard. *Why* this innocence; this God-devotedness; this blamelessness; this absence of all selfish antagonism? Why this life, so sweet, so pure, so gentle, so running over with untainted and ungrudging compassion, so conscious of unbroken and perfect communion and sympathy with God? Why? That He might, 'through the Eternal Spirit, offer Himself without spot unto God'; and that by His one offering He might perfect for ever all them that put their trust in Him.

Oh, brother! you do not understand the meaning of Christ's innocence unless you see in it the condition of efficiency of His sacrifice. It is that He might be the priest of the world that He wears this fine linen clean and white, the righteousness of a pure and perfect soul.

I beseech you, then, ponder for yourselves the meaning of this admitted fact. We all acknowledge His purity. We all adore, in some sense of the word, His perfect manhood. If the one stainless and sinless man that the world has ever seen had such a life and such a death as is told in these gospels, they are no gospels, except on one supposition. But for it they are the most despairing proclamation of the old miserable fact that righteousness suffers in the world. The life of Christ, if He be the pure and perfect man that we believe Him to be, and not the perfect priest offering up a pure sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, is the most damning indictment that was ever drawn up against the blunders of a Providence that so misgoverns the world.

'He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.' And, therefore, when we look upon His sufferings, in life and in death, we can only understand them and the relation of His innocence to the divine heart when we say: 'Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him. He hath put Him to grief,' 'by His stripes we are healed. Such a priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled'; the sacrificial Lamb, without blemish and without spot.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that we need a priest in the heavens, and we have in Christ the heavenly priest whom we need.

The two last qualifications for the priestly office included in my text are, 'separate from sinners; made higher than the heavens.' Now, the 'separation' intended, is not, as I suppose, Christ's moral distance from evil-doers, but has what I may call a kind of half-local signification, and is explained by the next clause. He is 'separate from sinners' not because He is pure and they foul, but because having offered His sacrifice He has ascended up on high.

He is 'made higher than the heavens.' Scripture sometimes speaks of the living Christ as at present in the heavens, and at others as having 'passed through' and being 'high above all heavens'; in the former case simply giving the more general idea of exaltation, in the latter the thought that He is lifted, in His manhood and as our priest, above the bounds of the material and visible creation, and 'set at the right hand of the Majesty on high.'

Such a priest we need. His elevation and separation from us upon earth is essential to that great and continual work of His which we call, for want of any more definite name, His intercession. The High Priest in the heavens presents His sacrifice there for ever. The past fact of His death on the Cross for the sins of the whole world is ever present as an element determining the direction of the divine dealings with all them that put their trust in Him. That sacrifice was not once only offered upon the Cross, but is ever, in the symbolical language of Scripture, presented anew in the heavens by Him. No time avails to corrupt or weaken the efficacy of that blood; and He has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever. Such a priest we need, to-day, presenting the sacrifice which, to-day, in our weakness and sinfulness, we require.

We need a priest who in the heavens bears us in His heart. As His type in the Old Testament economy entered within the veil with the blood; and when he passed within the curtain and stood before the Light of the Shekinah, had on his breast and on his shoulders, —the home of love, the seat of strength—the names of the tribes, graven on flashing stones, so our priest within the veil has your name and mine, if we love Him, close by His heart, governing the flow of His love, and written on His shoulders, and on the palms of His pierced hands, that all His strength may be granted to us. '*Such* a priest became us.'

And we need a priest separated from the world, lifted above the limitations of earth and time, wielding the powers of divinity in the hands that once were laid in blessing on the little children's heads. And *such* a priest we have. We need a priest in the heavens, whose presence there makes that strange country our home; and by whose footstep, passing through the gates and on to the golden pavements, the gate is open for us, and our faltering poor feet can tread there. And such a priest we have, passed within the veil, that to-day, in aspiration and prayer; and to-morrow in reality and person, where He is, there we may be also. '*Such* a priest became us.'

We need no other; we do need Him. Oh, friend! are you resting on that sacrifice? Have you given your cause into His hands to plead? Then the great High Priest will make you too His priest to offer a thank-offering, and Himself will present for ever the sacrifice that takes away your sin and brings you near to God. 'It is Christ that died, yea! rather, that is risen again'; and whose death and resurrection alike led on to His ascension to the right hand of God, where for ever 'He maketh intercession for us.'

THE ENTHRONED SERVANT CHRIST

'We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; 2. A minister of the sanctuary.'—HEB. viii. 1, 2.

A LITTLE consideration will show that we have in these words two strikingly different representations of our Lord's heavenly state. In the one He is regarded as seated 'on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty.' In the other He is regarded as being, notwithstanding that session, a 'minister of the sanctuary'; performing priestly functions there. This combination of two such opposite ideas is the very emphasis and force of the passage. The writer would have us think of the royal repose of Jesus as full of activity for us; and of His heavenly activity as consistent with deepest repose. Resting He works; working He rests. Reigning He serves; serving He reigns. So my purpose is simply to deal with these two representations, and to seek to draw from them and from their union the lessons that they teach.

I. Note, then, first, the seated Christ.

'We have a high priest who'—to translate a little more closely—'has *taken His seat* on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' 'Majesty' is a singular expression or periphrasis for God. It is used once again in this letter, and seems probably to have been derived by the writer from the Rabbinical usage of his times, when, as we know, a certain misplaced, and yet most natural, reverential or perhaps superstitious awe, made men unwilling to name the mighty name, and inclined rather to fall back upon other forms of speech to express it.

So the writer here, addressing Hebrews, steeped in Rabbinical thought, takes one of their own words and speaks of God as the 'Majesty in the heavens'; emphasising the idea of sovereignty, power, illimitable magnificence. 'At the right hand' of this throned personal abstraction, 'the Majesty,' sits the Man Christ Jesus.

Now the teaching, both of this Epistle to the Hebrews and of the whole New Testament, in reference to the state of our exalted Lord, is that His manhood is elevated to this supreme dignity. The Eternal Word who was with the Father in the beginning, before all the worlds, went back to 'the glory which He had with the Father.' But the new thing was that there went, too, that human nature which Jesus Christ indissolubly united with divinity in the mystery of the lowliness of His earthly life. An ancient prophet foretold that in the Messianic times there should spring from the cut-down stump of the royal house of Israel a sucker which, feeble at first, and in strange contrast with the venerable ruin from which it arose, should grow so swiftly, so tall and strong, that it should become an ensign for the nations of the world; and then, he adds, 'and His resting-place shall be glory.' There was a deeper meaning in the words, I suppose, than the prophet knew, and we shall not be chargeable with forcing New Testament ideas upon Old Testament words which are a world too narrow for them, if we say that there is at least shadowed the great thought that the lowly manhood, sprung from the humbled royal stock, shall grow up as a root out of a dry ground, without form or comeliness, and be lifted to find its rest and dwelling-place in the very central blaze of the divine glory. We have a High Priest who, in His manhood, in which He is knit to us, hath taken His seat on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Then, again, remember that whilst in such representations as this we have to do with realities set forth under the symbols of time and place, there is yet a profound sense in which that session of Jesus Christ at the right hand of God proclaims both the localisation of His present corporeal humanity and the ubiquity of His presence. For what *is* 'the right hand of God'? What is it but the manifestation of His energies, the forthputting of His power? And where is that but everywhere, where He makes Himself known? Wheresoever divine activity is manifested, there is Jesus Christ. But yet, though this be true, and though it may be difficult for us to hold the balance and mark the dividing line between symbol and reality, we are not to forget that the facts of Christ's wearing now a real though glorified body, and of His visible corporeal ascension, and the promise of a similar visible corporeal return to earth at the end of the days seem to require the belief that, above all the heavens, and filling all things, as that exalted manhood is, there is yet what we must call a place, wherein that glorified body now abides. And thus both the awful majestic idea of omnipresence, and the no less majestic idea of the present localisation in place of the glorified Christ, are taught us in the text.

And what is the deepest meaning of it all? What means that majestic session at 'the right hand of the throne'? Before that throne 'angels veil their faces.' If in action, they stand; if in adoration, they fall before Him. Creatures bow prostrate. Who is He that, claiming and exercising a power which in a creature is blasphemy and madness, *takes His seat* in that awful presence? Other words of Scripture represent the same idea in a still more wonderful form when they speak of 'the throne of God and of the Lamb,' and when He Himself speaks from heaven of Himself as 'set down with My Father on His throne.'

If we translate the symbol into colder words, it means that deep repose, which, like the divine rest after creation, is not for recuperation of exhausted powers, but is the sign of an accomplished purpose and achieved task, a share in the sovereignty of heaven, and the wielding of the energies of deity—rest, royalty, and power belong now to the Man sitting at the right hand of the throne of God.

II. Note, secondly, the servant Christ.

'A minister of the sanctuary,' says my text. Now the word employed here for 'minister,' and which I have ventured variously to translate servant, means one who discharges some public official act of service either to God or man, and it is especially, though by no means exclusively, employed in reference to the service of a ministering priest.

The allusion in the second portion of my text is plainly enough to the ritual of the great day of atonement, on which the high priest once a year went into the holy place; and there, in the presence of God throned between the cherubim, made atonement for the sins of the people, by the offering of the blood of the sacrifice. Thus, says our writer, that throned and sovereign Man who, in token of His accomplished work, and in the participation of deity, sits hard by the throne of God, is yet ministering at one and the same time within the veil, and presenting the might of His own sacrifice.

Put away the metaphor and we just come to this, a truth which is far too little dwelt upon in this generation, that the work which Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross, all sufficient and eternal as it was in the range and duration of its efficacy, is not all His work. The past, glorious as it is, needs to be supplemented by the present, no less wonderful and glorious, in which Jesus Christ within the veil, in manners all unknown to us, by His presence there in the power of the sacrifice that He has made, brings down upon men the blessings that flow from that sacrifice. It is not enough that the offering should be made. The deep teaching, the whole reasonableness of which it does not belong to us here and now to apprehend, but which faith will gladly grasp as a fact, though reason may not be able to answer the question of the why or how, tells us that the interceding Christ must necessarily take up the work of the suffering Christ. Dear brethren, our salvation is not so secured by the death upon the Cross as to make needless the life beside the throne. Jesus that died is the Christ 'that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.'

But, beyond that, may I remind you that my text, though not in its direct bearing, yet in its implication, suggests to us other ways in which the rest of Christ is full of activity. 'I am among you as He that serveth' is true for the heavenly glory of the exalted Lord quite as much as for the lowly humiliation of His life upon earth. And no more really did He stoop to serve when, laying aside His garments, He girded Himself with the towel, and wiped the disciples' feet, than He does to-day when, having resumed the garments of His glorious divinity, and having seated Himself in His place of authority above us, He comes forth, according to the wonderful condescension of His own parable, to serve His servants who have entered into rest, and those also who still toil. The glorified Christ is a ministering Christ. In us, on us, for us He works, in all the activities of His exalted repose, as truly and more mightily than He did when here He helped the weaknesses and healed the sicknesses, and soothed the sorrows and supplied the wants, and washed the feet, of a handful of poor men.

He has gone up on high, but in His rest He works. He is on the throne, but in His royalty He serves. He is absent from us, but His power is with us. The world's salvation was accomplished when He cried, 'It is finished'! But 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work,' and they who saw Him ascend into the heavens, and longingly followed the diminishing form as it moved slowly upward, with hands extended in benediction, as they turned away, when there was nothing more to be seen but the cloud, 'went everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

So then, let us ever hold fast, inextricably braided together, the rest and the activity, the royalty and the service, of the glorified Son of Man.

III. And now, in the last place, let me point to one or two of the practical lessons of such thoughts as these.

They have a bearing on the three categories of past, present, future. For the past a seal, for the present a strength, for the future a prophecy.

For the past a seal. If it be true—and there are few historical facts the evidence for which is more solid or valid—that Jesus Christ really went up into the heavens, and abode there, then that is God's last and most emphatic declaration, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.' The trail of light that He leaves behind Him, as He is borne onwards, falls on the Cross, and tells us that it is the centre of the world's history. For what can be greater, what can afford a firmer foundation for us sinful men to rest our confidence upon, than the death of which the recompense was that the Man who died sits on the throne of the universe?

Brethren! an ascended Christ forces us to believe in an atoning Christ. No words can exaggerate, nor can any faith exalt too highly, or trust too completely, the sacrifice which led straight to that exaltation. Read the Cross by the light of the throne. Let Olivet interpret Calvary, and we shall understand what Calvary means.

Again, this double representation of my text is a strength for the present. I know of nothing that is mighty enough to draw men's desires and fix solid reasonable thought and love upon that awful future, except the belief that Christ is there. I think that the men who have most deeply realised what a solemn, and yet what a vague and impalpable thing the conception of immortal life beyond the grave is, will be most ready to admit that the thought is cold, cheerless, full of blank misgivings and of waste places, in which the speculative spirit feels itself very much a foreigner. There is but one thought that flashes warmth into the coldness, and turns the awfulness and the terror of the chilling magnificence into attractiveness and homelikeness and sweetness, and that is that Christ is there sitting at the right hand of God. Foreign lands are changed in their aspect to us when we have brothers and sisters there; and our Brother has gone whither we too, when we send our thoughts after Him, can feel that our home is, because there He is. The weariness of existence here is only perpetuated and intensified when we think of it as prolonged for ever. But with Christ in the heavens, the heavens become the home of our hearts.

In like manner, if we only lay upon our spirits as a solid reality, and keep ever clear before us, as a plain fact, the present glory of Jesus Christ and His activity for us, oh! then life becomes a different thing, sorrows lose their poison and their barb, cares become trivial, anxieties less gnawing, the weights of duty or of suffering less burdensome; and all things have a new aspect and a new aim. If you and I, dear friends, can see the heavens opened, and Jesus on the throne, how petty, how unworthy to fix our desires, or to compel our griefs, will all the things here below seem. We then have the true standard, and the littlenesses that swell themselves into magnitude when there is nothing to compare them with will shrink into their insignificance. Lift the mists and let the Himalayas shine out; and what then about the little molehills in the foreground, that looked so big whilst the great white mass was invisible? See Christ, and He interprets, dwindles, and yet ennobles the world and life.

Lastly, such a vision gives us a prophecy for the future. *There* is the measure of the possibilities of human nature. A somewhat arrogant saying affirms, 'Whatever a man has done, a man can do.' Whatever *that* Man is, I may be. It is possible that humanity may be received into the closest union with divinity, and it is certain that if we knit ourselves to Jesus Christ by simple faith and lowly, obedient love, whatever He is He will give to us to share. 'Even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father on His throne,' is His own measure of what He will do for the men who are faithful and obedient to Him.

I do not say that there is no other adequate proof of immortality than the facts of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. I do not know that I should be far wrong if I ventured even on that assertion. But I do say that there is no means by which a poor sinful soul will reach the realisation of the possibilities that open to it, except faith in Jesus Christ. If we love Him, anything unreasonable and impossible is more reasonable and possible than that the Head shall be glorified and the members left to see corruption. If I am wedded to Jesus Christ, as you all may be if you will trust your souls to Him and love Him, then God will take us and Him as one into the glory of His presence, where we may dwell with and in Christ, in indissoluble union through the ages of eternity.

My text is the answer to all doubts and fears for ourselves. It shows us what the true conception of a perfect heaven is, the perfection of rest and the perfection of service. As Christ's heaven is the fulness of repose and of activity, so shall that of His servants be. 'His servants shall serve Him'—there is the activity—'and see His face'—there is the restful contemplation—'and His name shall be in their foreheads'—there is the full participation in His character and glory.

And so, dear brethren, for the world and for ourselves, hope is duty and despair is sin. Here is the answer to the question, Can I ever enter that blessed land? Here is the answer to the question, Is the dream of perfected manhood ever to be more than a dream? 'We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus,' and, seeing Him, no hope is absurd, and anything but hope is falling beneath our privileges. Then, dear friends, let us look unto Him who, 'for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of the Throne of God.'

THE TRUE IDEAL

'See (saith He) that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.'—HEB. viii. 5.

I DO not intend to deal with the original bearing of these words, nor with the use made of them by the writer of Hebrews. Primarily they refer to the directions as to the Tabernacle and its furniture, which are given at such length, and with such minuteness, in Leviticus, and are there said to have been received by Moses on Sinai. The author of this Epistle attaches an even loftier significance to them, as supporting his contention that the whole ceremonial worship, as well as the Temple and its equipment, was a copy of heavenly realities, the heavenly sanctuary and its altar and priest. I wish to take a much humbler view of the injunction, and to apply it, with permissible violence, as a maxim for conduct and the great rule for the ordering of our lives. 'See that thou,' in thy shop and office, and wherever thou mayst be, 'make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.' A far-reaching, high-soaring commandment, not to be obeyed without much effort, and able to revolutionise the lives of most of us. There are three points in it: the pattern, its universal applicability, and the place where we get to see it.

I. The pattern.—The difference between noble and ignoble lives is very largely that the one has—and seeks, however partially and interruptedly, to follow—an ideal and the other has not. Or, to put it into plainer words, the one man regulates his life according to momentary inclinations and the obvious calls of sense, business and the like, and the other man has, far ahead and high up, a great light burning, to which he is ever striving to attain. The one has an aim to which he can only approximate, and the other largely lives from hand to mouth, as circumstances and sense, and the recurring calls of material necessities, or temptations that are put in his way every day, may dictate. And so, the one turns out a poor creature, and the other—God helping him—may turn out a saint. Which are you? Which we are depends very largely on the clearness with which we keep before us—like some great mountain summit rising above the mists, and stirring the ambition of every climber to reach the peak, where foot has never trod—the ideal, to use modern language, or to fall back upon the good old-fashioned Bible words, 'the pattern shewed to us.'

You know that in mountain districts the mists are apt to gather their white folds round the summits, and that often for many days the dwellers in the plains have to plod along on their low levels, without a glimpse of the calm peak. And so it is with our highest ideal. Earth-born mists from the undrained swamps in our own hearts hide it too often from our eyes, and even when that is not the case, we are like many a mountaineer, who never lifts an eye to the sacred summit overhead, nor looks higher than his own fields and cattle-sheds. So it needs an effort to keep clear before us the pattern that is high above us, and to make very plain to ourselves, and very substantial in our thoughts, the unattained and untrodden heights. 'Not in vain the distance' should 'beckon.' 'Forward, forward, let us range,' should always be our word. 'See that thou make all things after the pattern,' and do not rule your lives according to whim, or fancy, or inclination, or the temptations of sense and circumstances.

To aim at the unreached is the secret of perpetual youth. No man is old as long as he aspires. It is the secret of perpetual growth. No man stagnates till he has ceased to see, or to believe in great dim possibilities for character, as yet unrealised. It is the secret of perpetual blessedness. No man can be desolate who has for his companion the unreached self that he may become. And so artist, poet, painter, all live nobler lives than they otherwise would, because they live, not so much with the commonplace realities round them, as with noble ideals, be they of melody or of beauty, or of musical words and great thoughts. There should be the same life with, and directed towards, attaining the unattained in the moralist, and above all in the Christian.

But then, do not let us forget that we are not here in our text, as I am using it in this sermon, relegated to a pattern which takes its origin, after all, in our own thoughts and imaginations. The poet's ideal, the painter's ideal, varies according to his genius. Ours has taken solidity and substance and a human form, and stands before us, and says: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.' 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern,' and be thankful that we are not left to our own thoughts, or to our brethren's teachings, or to abstract ideas of the true and the beautiful and the good for our pattern and mould of life, but that we have the law embodied in a Person, and the ideal made actual, in our Brother and our Saviour. *There* is the joy and the blessedness of the Christian aim after Christian perfection. There is something unsubstantial, misty, shadowy, in an ideal which is embodied nowhere. It is ghost-like, and has little power to move or to attract. But for Christians the pattern is all gathered into the one sweet, heart-compelling form of Jesus, and whatever is remote and sometimes cold in the thought of an unattained aim, changes when we make it our supreme purpose to be like Jesus Christ. Our goal is no cold, solitary mountain top. It is the warm, loving heart, and companionable purity and perfectness of our Brother, and when we can, even in a measure, reach that sweet resting-place, we are wrapped in the soft atmosphere of His love. We shall be like Him when we see Him as He is; we grow like Him here, in the measure in which we do see Him, even darkly. We reach Him most surely by loving Him, and we become like Him most surely by loving Him, for love breeds likeness, and they who live near the light are drenched with the light, and become lights in their turn.

There is another point here that I would suggest, and that is

II. The universal applicability of the pattern.—'See that thou make *all* things.' Let us go back to Leviticus. There you will find page after page that reads like an architect's specification. The words that I have taken as my text are given in immediate connection with the directions for making the seven-branched candlestick, which are so minute and specific and detailed, that any brass-founder in Europe could make one to-day 'after the pattern.' So many bowls, so many knops, so many branches; such and such a distance between each of them; and all the rest of it—there it is, in most prosaic minuteness. Similarly, we read how many threads and fringes, and how many bells on the high priest's robe. Verse after verse is full of these details; and then, on the back of them all, comes, 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern.' Which things are a parable—and just come to this, that the minutest pieces of daily life, the most commonplace and trivial incidents, may all be moulded after that great example, the life of Jesus Christ.

It is one of the miracles of revelation that it should be so. The life of Jesus Christ, in the fragmentary records of it in these four Gospels, although it only covered a few years, and is very imperfectly recorded, and in outward form was passed under conditions most remote from the strange complex conditions of *our* civilisation, yet fits as closely as a glove does to the hand, to all the necessities of *our* daily lives. Men and women, young men and maidens, old men and children, professional men and students, women in their houses, men of business, merchants, and they that sail the sea and they that dig in the mine, they may all find directions for everything that they have to do, in that one life.

And here is the centre and secret of it. 'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.' Therefore that which is the law for Jesus is the law for us, and the next verse goes on; 'he that loveth his life shall lose it,' and the next verse hammers the nail farther in: 'If any man serve Me, let him follow Me.'—Take that injunction and apply it, in all the details of daily life, and you will be on the road to reproduce the pattern.

But remember the 'all things.' It is for us, if we are Christian people, to bring the greatest principles to bear on the smallest duties, 'Small duties?' 'Great' and 'small' are adjectives that ought never to be tacked on to 'duty.' For all duties are of one size, and while we may speak, and often do speak, very mistakenly about things which we vulgarly consider 'great,' or superciliously treat as 'small,' the fact is that no man can tell what is a great thing, and what is a small one. For the most important crises in a man's life have a strange knack of leaping up out of the smallest incidents; just as a whisper may start an avalanche, and so nobody can tell what are the great things and what the small ones. The tiniest pin in a machine drops out, and all the great wheels stop. The small things are the things that for the most part make up life. You can apply Christ's example to the least of them, and there is very small chance of your applying it to the great things if you have not been in the way of applying it to the small ones. For the small things make the habits which the great ones test and require

So 'thorough' is the word. 'See that thou make all things according to the pattern.'

I remember once going up to the roof of Milan Cathedral, and finding there stowed away behind a buttress—where I suppose one man in fifty years might notice it, a little statuette, as completely chiselled, as perfectly polished, as if it had been of giant size, and set in the façade for all the people in the piazza to see. That is the sort of way in which Christian men should carve out their lives. Finish off the unseen bits perfectly, and then you may be quite sure that the seen bits will take care of themselves. 'See that thou make *all* things'—and begin with the small ones—'according to the pattern.'

Lastly,

III. Where we are to see the pattern.—'Shewed to thee *in the mount.*' Ay, that is where we have to go if we are to see it. The difference between Christian men's convictions of duty depends largely on the difference in the distance that they have climbed up the hill. The higher you go, the better you see the lie of the land. The higher you go, the purer and more wholesome the atmosphere. And many a thing which a Christian man on the low levels thought to be perfectly in accordance with 'the pattern,' when he goes up a little higher, he finds to be hopelessly at variance with it. It is of no use to lay down a multitude of minute, red-tape regulations as to what Christian morality requires from people in given circumstances. Go up the hill, and you will see for yourselves.

Our elevation determines our range of vision. And the nearer, and the closer, and the deeper is our habitual fellowship with God in Christ, the more lofty will be our conceptions of what we ought to be and do. The reason for inconsistent lives is imperfect communion, and the higher we go on the mountain of vision, the clearer will be our vision. On the other hand, whilst we see 'the pattern' in the mount, we have to come down into the valley to 'make' the 'things.' The clay and the potter's wheels are down in Hinnom, and the mountain top is above. You have to carry your pattern-book down, and set to work with it before you. Therefore, whilst the way to see the pattern is to climb, the way to copy it is to descend. And having faithfully copied what you saw on the Mount of Vision, you will see more the next time you go back; for 'to him that hath shall be given.'

THE ARTICLES OF THE NEW COVENANT

I. GOD'S WRITING ON THE HEART

. . . 'I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts.'—HEB. viii. 10.

WE can scarcely estimate the shock to a primitive Hebrew Christian when he discovered that Judaism was to fade away. Such an earthquake might seem to leave nothing standing. Now, the great object of this Epistle is to insist on that truth, and to calm the early Hebrew Christians under it, by showing them that the disappearance of the older system left them no poorer but infinitely richer, inasmuch as all that was in it was more perfectly in Christ's gospel. The writer has accordingly been giving his strength to showing that, all along the line, Christianity is the perfecting of Judaism, in its Founder, in its priesthood, in its ceremonies, in its Sabbath. Here he touches the great central thought of the covenant between God and man, and he falls back upon the strange words of one of the old prophets. Jeremiah had declared as emphatically as he, the writer, has been declaring, that the ancient system was to melt away and be absorbed in a new covenant between God and man. Is there any other instance of a religion which, on the one side, proclaims its own eternal duration—'the Word of the Lord endureth for ever'—and on the other side declares that it is to be abrogated, antiquated, and done away? The writer of the Epistle had learned from sacreder lips than Jeremiah's the same lesson, for the Master said at the most solemn hour of His career, 'This is the blood of the New Covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'

These articles of the New Covenant go very deep into the essence of Christianity, and may well be thoughtfully pondered by us all, if we wish to know what the specific differences between the ultimate revelation in Jesus Christ, and all other systems are. The words I have read for my text are the first of these articles.

I. Let us try to ascertain what exactly is the meaning of this great promise.

Now it seems to me that the two clauses which I have read for my text are not precisely parallel, but parallel with a difference. I take it, that 'mind' here means very much what we make it mean in our popular phraseology, a kind of synonym for the understanding, or the intellectual part of a man's nature; and that 'heart,' on the other hand, means something a little wider than it does in our popular phraseology, and indicates not only the affections, but the centre of personality in the human will, as well as the seat of love. So these two clauses will mean, you see, if we carry that distinction with us, two things—the clear perception of the will of God, and the coincidence of that will with our inclinations and desires. In men's natural consciences, there is the law written on their minds, but alas! we all know that there is an awful chasm between perception and inclination, and that it is one thing to know our duty, and quite another to wish to do it. So the heart of this great promise of my text is that these two things shall coincide in a Christian man, shall cover precisely the same ground; as two of Euclid's triangles having the same angles will, if laid upon each other, coincide line for line and angle for angle. Thus, says this great promise, it is possible—and, if we observe the conditions, it will be actual in us—that knowledge and will shall cover absolutely and exactly the same ground. Inclination will be duty, and duty will be inclination and delight. Nothing short of such a thought lies here.

And how is that wonderful change upon men to be accomplished? '*I* will put, *I* will write.' Only He can do it. We all know, by our own experience, the schism that gapes between the two things. *Every* man in the world knows a vast deal more of duty than *any* man in the world does. The worst of us has a standard that rebukes his evil, and the best of us has a standard that transcends his goodness, and, alas! often transcends his inclination. But the gospel of our Lord and Saviour comes armed with sufficient power to make this miracle an actuality for us all.

For it comes, does it not, to substitute for all other motives to obedience, the one motive of love? They but half understand the gospel who dwell upon its sanctions of reward and punishment, and would seek to frighten men into goodness by brandishing the whip of law before them, and uncovering the lid that shuts in the smoke of a hell. And they misinterpret it almost as much, if there be any such, who find the chief motive for Christian obedience in the glories of the heavenly state. These are subordinate and legitimate in their secondary place, but the gospel appeals to men, not merely nor chiefly on the ground of self-interest, but it comes to them with the one appeal, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.' That is how the law is written on the heart. Wherever there is love, there is a supreme delight in divining and in satisfying the wish and will of the beloved. His lightest word is law to the loving heart; his looks are spells and commandments. And if it is so in regard of our poor, imperfect, human loves, how infinitely more so is it where the heart is touched by true affection for His own infinite love's sake, of that 'Jesus' who is 'most desired!' The secret of Christian morality is that duty is changed into choice, because love is made the motive for obedience.

And, still further, let me remind you how this great promise is fulfilled in the Christian life, because to have Christ shrined in the heart is the heart of Christianity, and Christ Himself is our law. So, in another sense than that which I have been already touching, the law is written on the heart on which, by faith and self-surrender, the name of Christ is written. And when it becomes our whole duty to become like Him, then He being throned in our hearts, our law is within, and Himself to His 'darlings' shall be, as the poet has it about another matter, 'both law and impulse.' Write His name upon your hearts, and your law of life is thereby written there.

And, still further, let me remind you that this great promise is fulfilled, because the very specific gift of Christianity to men is the gift of a new nature which is 'created in righteousness and holiness that flows from truth.' The communication of a divine life kindred with, and percipient of, and submissive to, the divine will is the gift that Christianity—or, rather, let us put away the abstraction and say that Christ—offers to us all, and gives to every man who will accept it. And thus, and in other ways on which I cannot dwell now, this great article of the New Covenant lies at the very foundation of the Christian life, and gives its peculiar tinge and cast to all Christian morality, commandment, and obligation.

But let me remind you how this great truth has to be held with caution. The evidence of this letter itself shows that, whilst the writer regarded it as a distinctive characteristic of the gospel, that by it men's wills were stamped with a delight in the law of God, and a transcript thereof, he still regarded these wills as unstable, as capable of losing the sharp lettering, of having the writing of God obliterated, and still regarded it as possible that there should be apostasy and departure.

So there is nothing in this promise which suspends the need for effort and for conflict. Still 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit.' Still there are parts of the nature on which that law is not written. It is the final triumph, that the whole man, body, soul, and spirit is, through and through, penetrated with, and joyfully obedient to, the commandments of the Lord. There is need, too, not only for continuous progress, effort, conflict, in order to keep our hearts open for His handwriting, but also for much caution, lest at any time we should mistake our own self-will for the utterance of the divine voice. 'Love, and do what thou wilt,' said a great Christian teacher. It is an unguarded statement, but profoundly true as in some respects it is, it is only absolutely true if we have made sure that the 'thou' which 'wills' is the heart on which God has written His law.

Only God can do this for us. The Israelites of old were bidden 'these things which I command thee this day shall be on thy heart,' and they were to write them on their hand, and on the frontlet between their eyes, and on their doorposts. The latter commands were obeyed, having been hardened into a form; and phylacteries on the arm, and scrolls on the lintel, were the miserable obedience which was given to them. But the complete writing on the heart was beyond the power of unaided man. A psalmist said, 'I delight to do Thy will, and Thy law is within my heart.' But a verse or two after, in the same psalm, he wailed, 'Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head. Therefore my heart faileth me.' One Man has transcribed the divine will on His will, without blurring a letter, or omitting a clause. One Man has been able to say, in the presence of the most fearful temptations, 'Not My will, but Thine, be done.' One Man has so completely written, perceived, and obeyed the law of His Father, that, looking back on all His life, He was conscious of no defect or divergence, either in motive or in act, and could affirm on the Cross, 'It is finished.' He who thus perfectly kept that divine law will give to us, if we ask Him, His spirit, to write it upon our hearts, and 'the law of the spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'

II. Now, secondly, note the impassable gulf which this fulfilled promise makes between Christianity and all other systems.

It is a *new* covenant, undoubtedly—an altogether new thing in the world. For whatever other laws have been promulgated among men have had this in common, that they have stood over against the Will with a whip in one hand, and a box of sweets in the other, and have tried to influence desires and inclinations, first by the setting forth of duty, then by threatening, and then by promises to obedience. *There* is the inherent weakness of all which is merely law. You do not make men good by telling them in what goodness consists, nor yet by setting forth the bitter consequences that may result from wrong-doing. All that is surface work. But there is a power which says that it deals with the will as from within, and moves, and moulds, and revolutionises it. 'You cannot make men sober by act of parliament,' people say. Well! I do not believe the conclusion which is generally drawn from that statement, but it is perfectly true in itself. To tell a man what he ought to do is very, very little help towards his doing it. I do not under-estimate the value of a clear perception of duty, but I say that, apart from Christianity, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that clear perception of duty is like a clear opening of a great gulf between a man and safety, which only makes him recoil in despair with the thought, 'how can I ever leap across *that*?' But the peculiarity of the gospel is that it gives both the knowledge of what we ought to be; and with and in the knowledge, the desire, and with and in the knowledge and the desire, the power to be what God would have us to be.

All other systems, whether the laws of a nation, or the principles of a scientific morality, or the solemn voice that speaks in our minds proclaiming some version of God's law to every man — all these are comparatively impotent. They are like bill-stickers going about a rebellious province posting the king's proclamation. Unless they have soldiers at their back, the proclamation is not worth the paper it is printed upon. But Christianity comes, and gives us that which it requires from us. So, in his epigrammatic way, St. Augustine penetrated to the very heart of this article when he prayed, 'Give what Thou commandest, and command what Thou wilt.'

III. Note the freedom and blessedness of this fulfilled promise.

Not to do wrong may be the mark of a slave's timid obedience. Not to wish to do wrong is the charter of a son's free and blessed service. There is a higher possibility yet, reserved for heaven—not to be able to do wrong. Freedom does not consist in doing what I like—that turns out, in the long run, to be the most abject slavery, under the severest tyrants. But it consists in liking to do what I ought. When my wishes and God's will are absolutely coincident, then and only then, am I free. That is no prison, out of which we do not wish to go. Not to be confined against our wills, but voluntarily to elect to move only within the sacred, charmed, sweet circle of the discerned will of God, is the service and liberty of the sons of God.

Alas! there are a great many Christians, so-called, who know very little about such blessedness. To many of us religion is a burden. It consists of a number of prohibitions and restrictions and commandments equally unwelcome. 'Do not do this,' and all the while I would like to do it. 'Do that,' and all the while I do not want to do it. 'Pray, because it is your duty; go to chapel, because you think it is God's will; give money that you would much rather keep in your pockets: abstain from certain things that you hunger for; do other things that you do not at all desire to do, nor find any pleasure in doing.' That is the religion of hosts of people. They have need to ask themselves whether their religion is Christ's religion. Ah! brethren!—'My yoke is easy and My burden light; not because the things that He bids and forbids are less or lighter than those which the world's morality requires of its followers, but because, so to speak, the yoke is padded with the velvet of love, and inclination coincides, in the measure of our true religion, with the discerned will of God.

IV. Lastly, one word about the condition of the fulfilment of this promise to us.

As I have been saying, it is sadly far ahead of the experience of crowds of so-called Christians. There are still great numbers of professing Christians, and I doubt not that I speak to some such, on whose hearts only a very few of the syllables of God's will are written, and these very faintly and blotted. But remember that the fundamental idea of this whole context is that of a covenant, and a covenant implies two parties, and duties and obligations on the part of each. If God is in covenant with you, you are in covenant with God. If He makes a promise, there is something for you to do in order that that promise may be fulfilled to you.

What is there to do? First, and last, and midst, keep close to Jesus Christ. In the measure in which we keep ourselves in continual touch with Him, will His law be written upon our hearts. If we are for ever twitching away the paper; if we are for ever flinging blots and mud upon it, how can we expect the transcript to be clear and legible? We must keep still that God may write. We must wait habitually in His presence. When the astronomer wishes to get the image of some far-off star, invisible to the eye of sense, he regulates the motion of his sensitive plate, so that for hours it shall continue right beneath the unseen beam. So we have to still our hearts, and keep their plates—the fleshy tables of them—exposed to the heavens. Then the likeness of God will be stamped there.

Be faithful to what is written there, which is the Christian shape of the heathen commandment—'Do the duty that lies nearest thee; so shall the next become plainer.' Be faithful to the line that is 'written,' and there will be more on the tablet to-morrow.

Now this is a promise for us all. However blotted and blurred and defaced by crooked, scrawling letters, like a child's copy-book, with its first pot-hooks and hangers, our hearts may be, there is no need for any of us to say despairingly, as we look on the smeared page, 'What I have written I have written.' He is able to blot it all out, to 'take away the hand-writing'—our own—'that is against us, nailing it to His Cross,' and to give us, in our inmost spirits, a better knowledge of, and a glad obedience to, His discerned and holy will. So that each of us, if we choose, and will observe the conditions, may be able to say with all humility, 'Lo! I come, in the volume of the book it is written of *me*, *I* delight to do Thy will, yea! Thy law is within *my* heart.'

II. THEIR GOD, MY PEOPLE

'I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people.'—HEB. viii. 10.

Two mirrors set over against each other reflect one another and themselves in each other, in long perspective. Two hearts that love, with similar reciprocation of influence, mirror back to each other their own affections. 'I am thine; thou art mine,' is the very mother-tongue of love, and the source of blessedness. All loving hearts know that. That mutual surrender, and, in surrender, reciprocal possession, is lifted up here into the highest regions. 'I will be their God, they shall be My people.' That was the fundamental promise of the Mosaic dispensation, laid at Sinai—'Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession.' All through the Old Testament we find it re-echoed; and yet the interpenetration of God and the people was imperfect and external in that ancient covenant.

So the writer here, falling back upon the marvellous prophecy of Jeremiah, regards this as being one of the characteristics of Christianity, that what was shadowed in Israel's possession of God and God's possession of Israel, is, in substance, blessedly and permanently realised in the relations of God to Christian souls, and of Christian souls to God.

Not only is there this mutual possession, as expressed by the two halves of my text, but each half, when cleft and analysed, reveals the necessity for a similar reciprocity. For God's giving of Himself to us is nothing to us without our taking of God for ours; and, in like manner, our giving of ourselves to God, would be all incomplete, unless in His strange love, He stooped from amidst the praises of Israel to accept the poor gifts that we bring.

So the duality of my text breaks up into a double dualism, and we have God giving Himself to us, and His gift realised in our acceptance of Him for ours; and then we have our giving of ourselves to God, and the gift realised and ratified in His acceptance of us for His. And to these four points, briefly, I wish to turn.

I. 'I will be to them a God.' That is God's gift of Himself to us.

The words go far deeper than the necessary divine relation to all His creatures. He is a God to every star that burns, and to every worm that creeps, and to every gnat that dances for a moment. But there is a closer relation, and more blessed than that. He is a God to every man that lives, lavishing upon him manifestations of His divinity, and sustaining him in life. But besides these great and wondrous universal relations which spring from the very fact of creative power and creatural independence, there is a tenderer, a truer relationship of heart to heart, of spirit to spirit, which is set forth here as the prerogative of the men who trust in Jesus Christ. The special does not contradict or deny the universal, the universal does not exclude the special—'I will be a God to them,' in a deeper, more blessed, soul-satisfying, and vital sense than to others around them.

And what lies in that great promise passes the wit of man and the tongues of angels fully to conceive and tell. All that lies in that majestic monosyllable. which is shorthand for life, and light, and all perfectness, lived in a living person who has a heart, that word *God*—all that is included in that name, God will be to you and me, if we like to have Him for such. 'I will be a God to them'—then round about them shall be cast the bulwark of the everlasting arm and the everlasting purpose. 'I will be a God to them'—then in all dark places there will be a light, and in all perplexities there will be a path, and in all anxieties there will be quietness, and in all troubles there will be a hidden light of joy, and in every circumstance life will be saturated with an almighty presence, which shall make the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. 'I will be a God to them'—then their desires, their hungerings after blessedness, their seekings after good, need no longer roam open-mouthed and empty, throughout a waste world where there is only scanty fodder enough to keep them from expiring but never food enough to satisfy them; but in Him longings and hopes will all find their appropriate satisfaction. And there will be rest in God, and whatsoever aspirations after loftier goodness may have to be cherished, and whatsoever base hankerings still lingering have to be fought, the strength of a present God will enable us to aspire, and not to be disappointed, and to cast ourselves into the conflict, and be ever victorious. 'I will be to them a God,' is the same as to say that everything which my complex nature can require I shall find in Him.

It says, too, that all that Godhood, in all the incomprehensible sweep of its attributes, is on my side, if I will. They tell us that there are rays in the spectrum which no eye can see, but which yet have mightier chemical and other influences than those that are visible. The spectrum of God is not all visible, but beyond the limits of comprehension there lie dark energies which are full of blessedness and of power for us. 'I will be to them a God.' We can understand something of what that name signifies; and all that is enlisted for us. There is much which that name signifies that we do not understand, and all that, too, is working on our side.

Now, remember, that this giving of God to us by Himself is all concentrated in one historical act. He gave Himself to us, when He spared not His only begotten Son. My text is one of the articles of the New Covenant. And what sealed and confirmed all the articles of that Covenant? The blood of Jesus Christ. It was when 'God spared not His own Son,' and when the Son spared not Himself, on that Cross of Calvary, that there came to pass the ratifying and filling out and perfecting of the ancient, typical promise, 'I will be to them a God.' *There* was the unspeakable gift in which God was given to humanity.

II. And now we have to take the giving God and make Him our God.

I need not do more than just glance for a moment at that thought, for it is familiar enough to us all. Here is a treasure of gold lying in the road. Anybody that picks it up may have it; the man who does not pick it up does not get it, though it is there for him to lay his fingers on. Here is a river flowing past your door. You may put a pipe into it, and bring all its wealth and refreshment into your house, and use it for the quenching of your thirst, for the cleansing of your person, for the cooking of your victuals, for the watering of your gardens. And here is all the fulness of God welling past us, but Niagara may thunder close by a man's door, and he may perish of thirst. 'I will be to them a God.' What does that matter if I do not turn round and say: 'O Lord! Thou art my God'? Nothing! Beggars come to your door, and you give them a bit of bread, and they go away, and you find it flung into the mud round the corner. God gives us Himself. I wonder how many of us have tossed the gift over the first hedge, and left it there. Yet all the while we are dying for want of it, and do not know that we are.

Brethren! you have to enclose a bit of the prairie for your very own, and put a hedge round it, and cultivate it, and you will get abundant fruits. You have to translate 'their' into the singular possessive pronoun, and say 'mine,' and put out the hand of faith, and make Him in very deed yours. Then, and only then, is this giving perfected.

III. In the third place, we have to give ourselves to God.

We begin—as our text, profoundly, with all its simplicity, begins—with an act of God to us. He enters into loving relations with me, and it is only when I am melted and encouraged by the perception and reception of these relations that there comes the answering throb in my heart. The mirror in our spirit has the other one reflected upon it; then it flings back its own reflection to the parent glass. God comes first with the love that He pours over us poor creatures, and when 'we have known and believed the love that God hath to us,' then, and only then, do we throb back the reflected, ay, the kindred love. For love is the same thing in the divine heart and in my heart. In the other bonds that unite men to God, what is man's corresponds to what is God's. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness. My dependence corresponds to His sufficiency. My weak clinging answers to His strong grasp; my obedience to His commanding. But my *love* not only corresponds to, as the concave does to the convex, but it assimilates to, and is the likeliest thing in the creature to, the love of the Creator. And so there is a parallel, wonderful and blessed, between the giving love which says 'I will be to them a God,' and the recipient love which responds, 'We are to Thee a people.'

Remember, too, that not only is there this general resemblance, but that our love manifests itself to God—I was going to say, just as God's love manifests itself to us, though, of course, there are differences that I do not need to touch upon here, in the act of self-surrender. He gave Himself to us. Ay! and we may use another form of speech still more emphatic, and say, He gave up Himself. For, surely, difficult as it may be for us to keep our footing in those lofty heights where the atmosphere is so rare, the gift of Jesus Christ was surrender; when the Father spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all.

And, brethren, what is the surrender of the man who receives the love of God? In what region of my nature is that giving up of myself most imperative and blessed? In my will. The will is the man. The centre-point of every human being is the will, and it is no use for us to talk about our having given ourselves to God, in response and in thankfulness to His gift of Himself to us, unless we come and say 'Lord! not my will, but Thine'; and bow ourselves in unreluctant and constant submission to His commandments, and to all His will. Brethren, we give ourselves to God when, moved by His giving of Himself to us, we yield up our love to Him, and love never rests until it has yielded up its will to the beloved. He, indeed, gives, asking for nothing; but He gives in a still deeper sense, asking for everything; and that everything is myself. And I yield myself to Him in the measure in which I set my thankful love upon Him, and then bow myself as His servant, in humble consecration to Himself, with all my heart and soul and mind and strength.

IV. Lastly, God takes us for His.

'They shall be My people.' That is wonderful. It is strange that we can imitate God, in a certain fashion, in the gift of self; but it is yet more strange and blessed that God accepts that gift, and counts it as one of His treasures to possess us. One of the psalmists had a deep insight into the miracle of the divine condescension when he said 'He was extolled with *my* tongue.' Strange that the loftiest of creatures should be lifted higher by the poor tremulous lever of *my* praises! and yet He is so. He takes as His, such poor creatures, full of imperfection, and tremulous faith, and disproved love, as you and I know ourselves to be, and He says 'My people.' 'They shall be Mine,' My jewels, says He, 'in the day which I make.' Oh, brethren! it sometimes seems to me that it is more wonderful that God should take me for His, than that He should give me Himself for mine.

Have you given yourself to Him? Have you begun where He begins, taking first the gift that is freely given to you of God, even Jesus Christ, in whom God dwells, and who makes all the Godhead yours, for your very own? Have you taken God for yours, by faith in that Lord 'who loved me, and gave Himself for me?' And then smitten by His love and having the chains of self melted by the fire of His great mercy, have you said, 'Lo! truly I am Thy servant. Thou hast loosed my bonds'? Dear brethren, you never own yourselves till you give yourselves away; and you never will give yourselves to God, to be His, unless with all your heart and strength you cling to the rock-truth, that God has given Himself to every man who will take Him, in Jesus Christ, to be that man's God for ever and ever.

III. 'ALL SHALL KNOW ME

'They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.'—Heb. viii. 11.

In former sermons I have tried to bring out the force of the preceding two articles of 'the New Covenant.' These two were the substitution of inward inclination and impulse for the rigid bonds of an external commandment, and the substitution of a real, spiritual, mutual possession of God and His people for the mere outward relationship that existed between Israel and Jehovah. My text is the third article of the New Covenant. It lays hold, like the other two, of something that characterised the ancient dispensation, declares its imperfection, recognises its prophetic aspect, and asserts that all which the former merely shadowed and foretold is accomplished in Jesus Christ.

In old days there had been some direct communication between God and a chosen few, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation, and they spake the things that they had heard of God to the multitude who had had no such communication. My text says that all this is swept away, and that the prerogative of every Christian man is direct access to, communication with, and instruction from, God Himself. The text has two things in it; the promise, which is the essence of it, and a consequence which is deduced from that promise, and sets forth its results in a graphic manner. 'They all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest'; that is the real promise. 'They shall no more teach every man his neighbour . . . saying, Know the Lord,' is but a result thereof.

I. Now, I ask you to look with me at what this great promise means.

'They shall know Me.' Perhaps I can best explain what I take it to mean by commencing with an analogy or two which may help us to apprehend what is the significance of these words. We all know the difference between hearsay and sight. We may have read books of travel, and tell of some scene of great natural beauty or historic interest, and may think that we understand all about it, but it is always an epoch when our own eyes look for the first time at the snowy summit of an Alp, or for the first time at the Parthenon on its rocky height. We all know the difference between hearsay and experience. We read books of the poets that portray love and sorrow, and the other emotions that make up our throbbing, changeful life; but we need to go through the mill ourselves before we understand what the grip of the iron teeth of the harrow of affliction is, and we need to have had our own hearts dilated by a true and blessed affection, before we know the sweetness of love. Men may tell us about it, but we have to feel it ourselves before we know.

To come still closer to the force of my text, we all know the difference between hearing about a man and making his acquaintance. We may have been told much about him, and be familiar with his character, as we think, but, when we come face to face with him, and actually for ourselves experience the magnetism of his presence, or fall under the direct influence of his character, then we know that our former acquaintance with him, by means of hearsay, was but superficial and shadowy. 'I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eyes see thee.' Can you say that? If so, you understand my text—'They shall no more teach every man . . . his brother, saying, Know the Lord, and make acquaintance with Him' as if He were a stranger—for 'all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.'

There is all the difference between knowing *about* God and knowing God; just the difference that there is between dogma and life, between theology and religion. We may have all articles of the Christian creed clear in our understandings, and may owe our possession of them to other people's teaching; we may even, in a sense, believe them, and yet they may be absolutely outside of our lives, and it is only when they pass into the very substance of our being, and influence the springs of our conduct—it is only then that we know God.

Now, I maintain that this acquaintance with Him is what is meant in our text. It may not include any more intellectual propositions about Him than a man had before he knew Him, but it has turned doctrines into fact, and instead of the mere hearsay and traditional religion, which is the only religion of millions, it has brought the true heart-grasp of Him, which is the only thing worth calling a knowledge of God. For let me remind you that, whilst we may know a science or proposition by the exercise of our understandings in appropriate ways, that is not how we know people. And God is a person, and to know Him does not mean to understand *about* Him, but to be on speaking terms with Him, to have a familiar acquaintance with Him, to 'summer and winter' with Him, and so, by experience, to verify the things that before were mere doctrines. Now, at least the large majority of you call yourselves believers in Christianity. I want you to ask yourselves, and I would ask myself, whether my religion is knowing *about* God or knowing Him; whether it is all made up of a set of truths which I assent to, mainly because I am not sufficiently interested in them to contradict them, or whether these truths have become the very substance of my life. I do not believe in a religion without a dogma—I was going to say, I believe still less in a dogma without religion; and that is the Christianity of hosts of professing Christians. It is as useless as are the dried seeds that rattle in the withered head of a poppy in the autumn, or as the shrivelled kernel that sounds in the hollowness of a half-empty nut.

Remember, dear brethren, that to know God is to become acquainted with Him, and that only on the path of such familiar, friendly, loving intercourse and communion with Him, can men find the confirmation of the truths about Him which make up the eternal revelation of Him in the gospel. 'We know'—that is a valid certainty, arising from experience, and it has as good a right to call itself knowledge as have the processes by which men come to be sure about the physical facts of this material universe. Nay! I would even go further, and say that the fact that such a continual stream of witnesses, through all the generations, have been able to say, 'I have tasted and I have seen that God is good,' is to be taken into account by all impartial searchers after truth. And if men want to square their creeds with all the facts of humanity, let them not omit, in their consideration of the claims of Christian evidence, this fact, that from generation to generation men have said, and their lives have witnessed to its truths, 'We know in whom we have believed, and that He is able to keep us. We know that we are of God.' Dear brethren! the whole case for Christianity cannot be appreciated from outside. 'Taste and see.' My text shows us the more true way. If we will accept that covenant we shall know the Lord in the depths of our hearts.

II. Notice how far this promise extends.

'They all, from the least to the greatest, shall know. There is to be no distinction of rank or age, or endowment, which shall result in some of the people of God having a position from which any of the others are altogether shut out.

The writer is, of course, contrasting in his mind, though he does not express the contrast, the condition of things of old, when, as I said, the spiritual aristocracy of the nation received communications which they then imparted to their fellows. In the morning dawn the highest summits catch the rays first, but as the sun rises it floods the lower levels, and at mid-day shines right down into the depths of the cavities. So the world is now flooded with the light of Christ; and all Christian men and women, by virtue of their Christian character, do possess the unction from the Holy One, in which lie the potency and the promise of the knowledge of all things that are needful to be known for life and godliness. This is the true democracy of the gospel—the universal possession of the life of Christ through the Spirit.

Now, if that be so, then it is by no means a truth to be kept simply for the purpose of fighting against ecclesiastical or sacerdotal encroachments and denials of it, but it ought to be taken as the candle of the Lord, by each of us, and in the light of it we ought to search very rigidly, and very often, our own Christian character and experiences. You, dear brethren, with whom I am most closely associated here, you professing Christians of this congregation—do you know anything about that inward knowledge of God which comes from friendship with Him, and speaks irrefragable certainties in the heart which receives it? 'If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of His.' If you owe all your knowledge of, and your faith in, the great verities of the gospel, and the loving personality of God, to the mere report of others, if you cannot verify these by your own experience, if you cannot say, 'Many things I know not; you can easily puzzle me with critical and philosophical subtleties, but this one thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see'—if you cannot say that, I pray you, bethink yourselves whether your religion is not mainly a form, and how far it has any life in it at all.

But whilst thus the great promise of my text, in its very blessedness and fulness, does carry with it some solemn suggestions for searching self-examination, it also points in another direction. For consider what it excludes and what it permits, in the way of brotherly help and guidance. It certainly excludes on the one hand, all assumption of authority over the consciences and the understandings of Christian people, on the part either of churches or individuals, and it makes short work of all claims that there continues a class of persons officially distinguished from their brethren, and having closer access to God than they. The true understanding of these words of my text, the recognition of the universality of the knowledge of God in all Christian people, has great revolutionary work yet to do amongst the churches of Christendom. For I do not know that there are any of them that have sufficiently recognised this principle. Not only in a church where there is a priesthood and an infallible head of the Church on earth, nor only in churches that are bound by human creeds imposed on them by men, but also in churches like ours, where there is no formal recognition of either of these two errors, the practical contradiction of this article of the New Covenant is apt to creep in. It is a great deal more the fault of the people than of the priest, a great deal more the fault of the congregation than of the pastor, when they are lazily contented to take all their religion at second-hand from him, and to shuffle all the responsibility off their own shoulders on to his. If my text obliges me, and all men who stand in my position, to say with the Apostle, 'Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy,' it obliges you, dear brethren, to take nothing from me, or any man, on our bare words, nor to exalt any of us into a position which would contradict the great principle of my text, but yourselves, at first hand, to go to God, and get straight from Him the teaching which He only can give. Dominion and subjection, authority and submission to men, in any part of the church are shut out by such words as these.

But brotherly help is not shut out. If a party of men are climbing a hill, and one is in advance of his fellows, when he reaches the summit he may look down and call to those below, and tell them how fair and wide the view is, and beckon them to come and give them a helping hand up. So, because Christian men vary in the extent to which they possess and utilise the one gift of knowledge of God, and some of them are in advance of the others, it is all in accordance with the principle of my text that they that are in advance should help their brethren, and give them a brotherly hand. Not as if my brother's word can give me the inward knowledge of God, but it may help me to get that knowledge for myself. We—I speak now as a member of the preaching class—we can but do what the friend of the bridegroom does; he brings the bride to her lover, and then he shuts the door and leaves the two to themselves. That is all that any of us can do. You must yourself draw the water from the well of salvation. We can only tell you, 'there *is* the well, and the water is sweet.'

III. Lastly, the means by which this promise is fulfilled.

I have already pointed out, in previous sermons, that the conception of the gospel as a new covenant was endorsed by Jesus Christ Himself in words which tell us how all these blessings that are set forth in this context are secured and brought to men, when in the institution of the Lord's Supper, He spoke of 'the New Covenant in His blood.' So I set first and foremost, above all other means, this one great truth, that all this inward knowledge of God, which is the prerogative of every Christian man, is made possible and actual for any of us, only by and through the mission, and especially the death, of Jesus Christ our Lord. For therein does He set forth God to be known as nothing else but that supreme suffering and supreme self-surrender upon the Cross, ever can do or has done. We know God as He would have us know Him, only when we see Jesus suffering and dying for us; and then adoringly, as one in the presence of a mystery into which he can but look a little way, say that even there and then 'he that hath seen that Christ hath seen the Father.'

Jesus Christ's blood, the seal of the Covenant, is the great means by which this promise is fulfilled, inasmuch as in that death He sweeps away all the hindrances which bar us out from the knowledge of God. The great dark wall of my sin rises between me and my Father. Christ's blood, like some magic drops upon a fortification, causes all the black barrier to melt away like a cloud; and the access to the throne of God is patent, even for sinful creatures like us. The veil is rent, and by that blood we have access into the holiest of all.

Christ is the source of this knowledge of God, inasmuch, further, as by His mission and death there is given to the whole world, if it will receive it, and to all who exercise faith in His name, the gift of that Divine Spirit who teaches to our inmost spirit the true knowledge of His Son.

And so, dear brethren, since it is in the incarnate and dying Christ that all knowledge of God is brought to men, that all possibility of friendship and communion between men and God is rooted, and that the Divine Spirit who leads us into the deep things of God is granted to each of us, there follows the plain conclusion that the one way by which every man and woman on earth may find him and herself included within that 'all, from the least to the greatest,' is simply trust in Christ Jesus, in whom, in whose life, in whose death, God is made known, our alienation is swept away, and the Spirit of God, the Divine Teacher, is granted to us all.

Only, remember that my text stands in close connection with the preceding articles of this covenant, and that to delight in the law of the Lord is the sure way to know more of the Lord. One act of obedience from the heart will teach us more of God than all the sages can. It is more illuminating simply to do as He willed than to read and think and speculate and study. 'If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the teaching.' And mutual possession of God by us, and of us by God, leads to fuller knowledge. To possess God is to love Him; and 'he that loveth knoweth God, yea! rather is known of God.'

So, dear brethren, do not be content with traditional religion, with a hearsay Christianity. 'Acquaint now thyself with Him,' and be at peace. Oh! there is nothing sweeter to a true preacher of Christ and His salvation than that those to whom he preaches should be able to do without him. It is my business to point you away from myself, however much I prize your love and confidence, as I ought to do; and to beseech you, for your own soul's sake, that you would by faith in Christ attain that knowledge of the only true God which He is sent to give. Then you will be able to say, 'Now, we believe not because of thy saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is, indeed, the Christ, the Saviour of the world.'

IV. FORGIVENESS THE FUNDAMENTAL BLESSING

'For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.'—HEB. viii. 12.

WE have been considering, in successive sermons, the great promises preceding my text, which are the articles of the New Covenant. We reach the last of these in this discourse. It is last in order of enumeration because it is first in order of fulfilment. The foundation is dug down to and discovered last, because the stones of it were laid first. The introductory 'for' in my text shows that the fulfilment of all the preceding great promises depends upon and follows the fulfilment of this, the greatest of them. Forgiveness is the keystone of the arch. Strike it out, and the whole tumbles into ruin. Forgiveness is the first gift to be received from the great cornucopiæ of blessings which the gospel brings for men. The writer is tracing the stream upwards, and therefore he comes last to that which first gushes out from the divine heart. All these previous promises of delight in the law of the Lord, mutual possession between God and His people, knowledge of God which is based upon love, are consequences of this final article, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their iniquities will I remember no more.'

I. So, then, we remark, first, that forgiveness deals with man's deepest need.

It is fundamental, because it grapples with the true evil of humanity, which is not sorrow, but is sin. All men have 'come short of the glory of God,' and that fact, the fact of universal sinfulness, is the gravest fact of man's condition; for it affects his whole nature, and it disturbs and perverts all his relations to God. And so, if men would rightly diagnose the disease of humanity, they must recognise something far deeper than skin-deep symptoms, and discover that it is sin which is the source of all human misery and sorrow. To deal with humanity and to forget or ignore the true source of all the misery in the world—namely, the fact that we 'have all sinned and come short of the glory of God'—

is absurd. 'Miserable comforters are ye all,' if pottering over the patient, you apply ointment to pimples when he is dying of cancer. I know, of course, that a great deal may be done, and that a great deal is to-day being done, to diminish the sum of human wretchedness; and I am not the man to say one word that shall seem to under-estimate or pour cold water upon any of these various schemes of improvement—philanthropic, social, economic, or political; but I do humbly venture to say that any of them, and all of them put together, if they do not grapple with this fact of man's sin, are dealing with the surface and leaving the centre untouched. Sin does not come only from ignorance, and therefore it cannot be swept away by knowledge. It does not come only from environment, and therefore it cannot be taken out of human history by improvement of circumstances. It does not come from poverty, and therefore economical changes will not annihilate it. The root of it lies far deeper than any of these things. The power which is to make humanity blessed must dig down to the root and grasp that, and tear it up, and eject it from the heart of man before society can be thoroughly healed.

Now, what does Christianity do with this central part of human experience? My text tells us partly, and only partly, 'I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' Of course, the divine oblivion is a strong metaphor for the treatment of man's sins as non-existent. It is the same figure, in a somewhat different application, as is found in the great promise, 'I will cast their sins behind My back into the depths of the sea.' It is the same metaphor as is suggested in a somewhat different application, by the other saying, 'Blessed is the man whose sin is covered.' And the fact that underlies the metaphors of forgetfulness or burying in the ocean depths, or covering over so as to be invisible, is just this, that God's love flows out to the sinful man, unhindered by the fact of his transgression.

If Christian people, and doubters about Christian truth, would understand the depth and loftiness of the Christian idea of forgiveness, there would be less difficulty felt about it. For pardon is not the same thing as the removal of the consequences of wrong-doing. It is so in regard of the mere outward judicial procedure of nations, but it is not so in the family. A father often pardons, and says that he does so before he punishes, and it is the same with God. The true notion and essence of forgiveness, as the Bible conceives it, is not the putting aside of consequences, but the flow of the Father's heart to the erring child.

Sin is a great black dam, built up across the stream, but the flood of love from God's heart rises over it, and pours across it, and buries it beneath the victorious, full waters of the 'river of God.' Here is a world wrapped in mist, and high above the mist the unbroken sunshine of the divine love pours down upon the upper layer, and thins and thins and thins it until it disappears, and the full sunshine floods the rejoicing world, and the ragged fragments of the mist melt into the blue. 'I have blotted out as a cloud thy sins and as a thick cloud thy transgressions.' The outward consequences of forgiven sin may have to be reaped. If a man has lived a sensuous life, no repentance, no forgiveness, will prevent the drunkard's hand from trembling, or cure the corrugations of his liver. If a man has sinned, no divine forgiveness will ever take the memory of his transgressions, nor their effects, out of his character. But the divine forgiveness may so modify the effects as that, instead of past sin being a source of torment or a tyrant which compels to future similar transgressions, pardoned sin will become a source of lowly self-distrust, and may even tend to increase in goodness and righteousness. When bees cannot remove some corruption out of the hive they cover it over with wax, and then it is harmless, and they can build upon it honey-bearing cells. Thus it is possible that, by pardon, the consequences which must be reaped may be turned into occasions for good.

But the act of the divine forgiveness does annihilate the deepest and the most serious consequences of my sin; for hell is separation from God, the sense of discord and alienation between Him and me; and all these are swept away.

So here is the foundation blessing, which meets man's deepest need. And be sure of this, that any system which cannot grapple with that need will never avail for the necessities of a sinful world. Unless our new evangelists can come to us with as clear an utterance as this of my text, they will work their enchantments in vain; and the world will be the old, sad, miserable world, after all that they can do.

II. This forgiveness is attained through Christ, and through Him only.

I have tried to show in former sermons, that the whole of these promises of what our writer calls 'the New Covenant,' are, as our Lord Himself said, sealed 'in His blood.' And that is especially true in reference to this promise of forgiveness. It is in Christ Jesus, and in Christ Jesus alone, that that pardon which my text speaks of is secured to men.

I need not dwell upon the Scriptural statements to this effect, but I desire to emphasise this thought, that the Christian teaching of forgiveness is based upon the conception of Christ's work and especially of Christ's death, as being the atonement for the world's sin. It is because, and only because, 'He bore our sins in His own body on the tree,' that the full-toned gospel proclamation can be rung out to men, that God 'remembers their transgressions no more.' Unless that foundation be firmly laid in the New Testament conception of the meaning and power of the death of Christ, I know not where there is a basis for the proclamation to man of divine forgiveness.

Of course, my text itself does show that the very common misrepresentation of the New Testament evangelical teaching about this matter is a misrepresentation. It is often objected to that teaching that it alleges that Christ's sacrifice effected a change in the divine heart and disposition, and made God love men whom He did not love before. The mighty 'I will' of my text makes no specific reference to Christ's death, and rather implies what is the true relation between the love of God and the death of Jesus Christ, that God's love was the originating cause, of which Christ's death was the redeeming effect. 'He so loved the world that He gave His . . . Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should . . . have eternal life.' And no wise evangelical teacher ever has asserted, or does assert, anything else than that the mission of Jesus Christ is the consequence, and not the cause, of the Father's love to sinful men.

But that being kept distinctly in view, I suppose I need not remind you how, like the strand that runs through the cables of the Royal Navy, the red thread of Christ's sacrifice for the sins of the whole world runs through the whole of the New Testament. It is fashionable nowadays to say that no theory of the atonement is needed in order that men should receive the benefit of Christ's work. That is partially true, in so far as that no human conceptions will exhaust the fulness of that great work, nor can penetrate to all its depths. But it is not true, as I humbly take it, inasmuch as if a man is to get the forgiveness that comes through Jesus Christ, he must have this theory, that 'Christ died *for our sins* according to the Scriptures.' And that is the teaching of the whole New Testament.

I need not remind you how all Paul's writing is saturated with it, but I may remind you that to people who were very lynx-eyed critics of him and of his teaching, he said, about that very statement that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures—'whether it were they or I, so we preach.' And his appeal to the consensus and unanimity of the apostles is amply vindicated by the documents that still remain. We are told that there are types of teaching in the New Testament. There are, and very beautifully they vary, and very harmoniously they blend. But there are no diversities in regard to this matter. If Paul says, 'In whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins,' Peter says, 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree'; and John says, 'He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world.' And if, as I believe, the Book of the Revelation is his, the vision that John saw in the heavens was the vision of 'a Lamb as it had been slain'; and the song which he heard rising from immortal lips was of praise unto Him that 'hath loosed us from our sins by His own blood.'

'So they preached.' God grant that it may be true of all of us; 'so we believe.' For, brethren, this clear, certain statement of the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ is the characteristic glory of the whole revelation. Without it, apart from Him and His Cross, I do not know how the hope of forgiveness can be more than dim and doubtful. I know not how any man that has once felt the grip of evil on his inclinations, and the responsibility and guilt which he has drawn down upon his head by his transgressions, can find a firm footing for his assurance of pardon, apart from the Cross of Jesus Christ. Without that, the divine forgiveness is but a peradventure, sometimes a hope, sometimes an illusion. The men that reject Christianity for the most part proclaim the gospel of despair. 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' in such a sense as to annihilate the possibility of pardon. But in Christ we understand that we may reap these fruits, and yet be pardoned. 'Thou wast a God that forgavest them, and tookest vengeance of their inventions.' Forgiveness apart from Christ stands, as it seems to me, in no intelligible relation to the divine character. And, apart from Christ, forgiveness is apt to dwindle down, and to be degraded into mere lazy tolerance of evil, and to make God a good-natured, indifferent Sovereign, who does not so very much mind whether His subjects do His will or not.

But when we can say, 'He died for my sins,' then we can see that the divine righteousness and the divine love are but two names for one thing, and forgiveness lifts us into a region of higher purity. Christianity alone teaches the loftiest ideal of human righteousness, the loftiest conception of the divine character, the absolute inflexibility of the divine law and withal full, free pardon. It stands alone in the sombre aspect under which it contemplates humanity, and the boundless hope of its possibilities which it entertains. It stands alone in that forgiveness is the means to higher holiness; and in that, pardoning, it heals, and whispers 'Go thy way; sin no more, lest a worse thing befall thee.' Therefore is it a gospel; therefore is it the New Covenant in His blood.

III. Lastly, this forgiveness is fundamental to all other Christian blessings.

As I have said, the very structure of our text shows that that was the writer's idea. There can be no 'delight in the law of the Lord,' which is the first of the articles of the New Covenant, until there is the taking away of the sin which deepens aversion to God's law, and until the Lawgiver has become beloved for the sake of His received forgiveness. Then we shall delight in the law when we love the lips that proclaim it, because before they issued commandments they decreed absolution, and declared 'Neither do I condemn thee.'

Forgiveness precedes the second of these covenant blessings—viz., mutual possession between God and His people. For so long as there remains unforgiven sin in a man's heart, it comes like a film of atmospheric air or grains of dust between two polished metal plates, forbidding their adhesion; and only when it is taken away will they come together and abide united. It lies at the foundation of, and must precede, all that true knowledge of God, which is the third of the articles of the covenant, and is a consequence of love and communion. 'For how can two walk together except they be agreed?' Until my sin is taken from me the eyes of my soul are dim; and I know not God in deep reciprocal possession and continual love. And so with all other of the blessings and the hopes which Christian men are entitled to cherish by reason of this covenant of God's changeless love.

I need not dwell upon them, but I would leave with you these thoughts. A Christianity which does not begin with the proclamation of forgiveness is impotent. Again, a Christianity which does not base forgiveness on Christ's sacrifice is also impotent. The history of the Church shows that preachers and teachers and churches that do not know what to say when a poor soul comes to them and asks, 'What must I do to be saved?' are of no use, or next to none The man in whom there are devils says to such maimed representations of the gospel, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?' and leaps upon them, and overcomes them. The whole experience of the past demonstrates that. And so one laments the vagueness and the faltering in proclaiming this truth so common in this day. Brethren, I, for my part, believe that the only type of Christianity which will win men's hearts is that modelled on the pattern of the New Testament teaching, which begins with the fact of sin, and, having dealt with that, then goes on to bestow all other blessings.

But do not forget another thing, that a Christianity which does not build holiness, delight in God's law, conscious possession of Him and possession by Him, and deep, blessed knowledge of Him, on forgiveness, is wofully imperfect. And that is the Christianity of a great many of us. Here is the first round of the ladder: 'I will remember their iniquities no more.' Put your foot upon that and then begin to ascend; and do not stop till you have reached the top, whence His face looks down, and whence you can step on to the stable standing-ground beside His very throne. Begin with forgiveness, and all these blessings shall be added unto you, if you keep the covenant of your God.

THE PRIEST IN THE HOLY PLACE

'But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; 12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: 14. How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: 25. Nor yet that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others: 26. (For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world:) but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. 27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: 28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation.'—HEB. ix. 11-14, 24-28.

SPACE forbids attempting full treatment of these pregnant verses. We can only sum up generally their teaching on the priesthood of Jesus.

I. Christ, as the high priest of the world, offers Himself. Obviously verse 14 refers to Christ's sacrificial death, and in verse 26 His 'sacrifice of Himself' is equivalent to His 'having suffered.' The contention that the priestly office of Jesus begins with His entrance into the presence of God is set aside by the plain teaching of this passage, which regards His death as the beginning of His priestly work. What, then, are the characteristics of that offering, according to this writer? The point dwelt on most emphatically is that He is both priest and sacrifice. That great thought opens a wide field of meditation, for adoring thankfulness and love. It implies the voluntariness of His death. No necessity bound Him to the Cross. Not the nails, but His love, fastened Him there. Himself He would not save, because others He would save. The offering was 'through the Eternal Spirit,' the divine personality in Himself, which as it were, took the knife and slew the human life. That sacrifice was 'without blemish,' fulfilling in perfect moral purity the prescriptions of the ceremonial law, which but clothe in outward form the universal consciousness that nothing stained or faulty is worthy to be given to God. What are the blessings brought to us by that wondrous self-sacrifice? They are stated most generally in verse 26 as the putting away of sin, and again in verse 28 as being the bearing of the sins of many, and again in verse 14 as cleansing conscience from dead works to serve the living God. Now the first of these expressions includes the other two, and expresses the blessed truth that, by His death, Jesus has made an end of sin, in all its shapes and powers, whether it is regarded as guilt or burden, or taint and tendency paralysing and disabling. Sin is guilt, and Christ's death deals with our past, taking away the burden of condemnation. Thus verse 28 presents Him as bearing the sins of many, as the scapegoat bore the sins of the congregation into a land not inhabited, as 'the Lord made to meet' on the head of the Servant 'the iniquities of us all.' The best commentary on the words here is, 'He bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' But sin has an effect in the future as in the past, and the death of Christ deals with that. So verse 14 parallels it not only with the sacrifice which made access to God possible, but with the ceremonial of the red heifer,' by which pollution from touching a corpse was removed. A conscience which has been in contact with 'dead works' (and all works which are not done from 'the life' are so) is unfit to serve God, as well as lacking in wish to serve; and the only way to set it free from the nightmare which fetters it is to touch it with 'the blood,' and then it will spring up to a waking life of glad service. 'The blood' is shed to take away guilt; 'the blood' is the life, and, being shed in the death, it can be transfused into our veins, and so will cleanse us from all sin. Thus, in regard both to past and future, sin is put away by the sacrifice of Himself. The completeness of His priestly work is further attested by the fact, triumphantly dwelt on in the lesson, that it is done once for all, and needs no repetition, and is incapable of repetition, while the world lasts.

II. Christ, as the high priest of the world, passes into heaven for us. The priest's office of old culminated in his entrance into the Holy of Holies, to present the blood of sacrifice. Christ's priesthood is completed by His ascension and heavenly intercession. We necessarily attach local ideas to this, but the reality is deeper than all notions of place. The passage speaks of Jesus as 'entering into the holy place,' and again as entering 'heaven itself for us.' It also speaks of His having entered 'through the greater and more perfect tabernacle,' the meaning of which phrase depends on the force attached to 'through.' If it is taken locally, the meaning is as in chapter iv. 14, that He has passed through the [lower] heavens to 'heaven itself'; if it is taken instrumentally (as in following clause), the meaning is that Jesus used the 'greater tabernacle' in the discharge of His office of priest. The great truth underlying both the ascension and the representations of this context is, as verse 24 puts it, that He appears 'before the face of God,' and there carries on His work, preparing a place for us. Further, we note that Jesus, as priest representing humanity, and being Himself man, can stand before the face of God, by virtue of His sacrifice, in which man is reconciled to God. His sinless manhood needed no such sacrifice, but, as our representative, He could not appear there without the blood of sacrifice. That blood, as shed on earth, avails to 'put away sin'; as presented in heaven, it avails 'for us,' being ever present before the divine eye, and influencing the divine dealings. That entrance is the climax of the process by which He obtained 'eternal redemption' for us. Initial redemption is obtained through His death, but the full, perfect unending deliverance from all sin and evil is obtained, indeed, by His passing into the Holy Place above, but possessed in fact only when we follow Him thither. We need Him who 'became dead' for pardon and cleansing; we need Him who is 'alive for evermore' for present participation in His life and present sitting with Him in the heavenly places, and for the ultimate and eternal entrance there, whence we shall go no more out.

III. Christ, as the high priest of the world, will come forth from the holy place. The ascension cannot end His connection with the world. It carries in itself the prophecy of a return. 'If I go, . . . I will come again.' The high priest came forth to the people waiting for him, so our High Priest will come. Men have to die. and 'after death,' not merely as following in time, but as necessarily following in idea and fact, a judgment in which each man's work shall be infallibly estimated and manifested. Jesus has died 'to bear the sins of many.' There must follow for Him, too, an estimate and manifestation of His work. What for others is 'judgment,' for Him is manifestation of His sinlessness and saving power. He shall be seen, no longer stooping under the weight of a world's sins, but 'apart from sin.' He shall be seen 'unto salvation,' for the vision will bring with it assimilation to His sinless likeness. He shall be thus seen by those that wait for Him, looking through the shows of time to the far-off shining of His coming, and meanwhile having their loins girt and their lamps burning.

THE ENTHRONED CHRIST

'This man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.'—HEB. x. 12.

To that tremendous assertion the whole New Testament is committed. Peter, Paul, John, the writer of this book—all teach that the Jesus who died on Calvary now sits at the right hand of God. This is no case of distance casting a halo round the person of a simple teacher, for six weeks after Calvary, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter declared that Jesus, 'exalted at the right hand of God,' had 'shed forth this,' the gift of that Divine Spirit. This is no case of enthusiastic disciples going beyond their Master's teaching, for all the evangelists who record our Lord's trial before the Sanhedrin concur in saying that the turning-point of it, which led to His condemnation, was the declaration, 'Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power.' The rulers interpreted the assertion to mean an assertion of divinity, and therefore condemned Him to death. Christ was silent, and the silence witnessed that they interpreted His meaning aright. So, then, for good or evil, we have Jesus making the tremendous assertion, which His followers but repeated. Let us try to look at these words, and draw from them some of the rich fulness of their meaning. Communion, calm repose, participation in divine power and dominion, and much besides, are implied in this great symbol. And I desire to dwell upon the various aspects of it for a few moments now.

I. Here we have the attestation of the completeness, the sufficiency, and the perpetuity of Christ's sacrifice.

Look at the context. Mark the strong words which immediately precede the last clause of my text. 'This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.' The writer has just been arguing that all Jewish sacrifice, which he regarded as being of divine appointment, was inadequate, and derived its whole importance from being a prophetic shadow of the perfect sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And he points, first, in proof of his thesis, to the entire disparity of the two things—the taking away of sin, and the blood of bulls and of goats. And then he adds a subsidiary consideration, saying in effect, 'The very fact that day after day the sacrifices are continued, shows that they had no power to do the thing for which they were offered—viz., to quiet consciences.' For, if the consciences were quieted, then the sacrifice would cease to be offered. And so he draws a sharp contrast between the priests who stand daily ministering and 'offering oftentimes the same sacrifice,' which by their very repetition are demonstrated to be inadequate to effect their purpose, and Jesus. Instead of these priests standing, offering, and doing over and over again their impotent sacrifices, 'this Man' offered His once. That was enough, and for ever. And the token that the one sacrifice was adequate, really could take away sin, would never, through all the rolling ages of the world's history, lose its efficacy, lies here—He sits at the right hand of God.

Brethren, in that session, which the Lord Himself commanded us to believe, is the divine answer and endorsement of the triumphant cry upon the Cross, 'It is finished,' and it is God's last, loudest, and ever-reverberating proclamation to all the world, in all its generations, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'

Do you think of Christ's mission and Christ's work as this writer thought of it, finding the vital centre in its sacrificial efficacy, seeing it as being mainly a work caused by, in relation to, and victorious over, man's sin and my sin, and as attested as sufficient for all sin, for the sins of the world, in all generations, by the fact that, having offered it once, the High Priest, as this same writer says in another place, sat at the right hand of God? These two things, the high Scriptural notion of the essential characteristic and efficacy of Christ's work as being sacrificial, and the high Scriptural notion of His present session at the right hand of God; these two things are correlated and bound inseparably together. If you only think of Jesus Christ as being a great teacher, a blessed example, the very flower and crown of immaculate humanity, if you listen to His words, and rejoice over the beauty of His character, but do not see that *the* thing which He, and He alone, does, is to deal with the tremendous reality of human transgression, and to annihilate it, both in regard of its guilt and of its power, then the notion of His session at the right hand of God becomes surplusage and superstition. But if we see, as I pray God that we may each see for ourselves, that when He came, He 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister,' and that even that does not exhaust the significance of His Person, and the purpose of His mission, but that He came 'to give His life a ransom for many,' then, oh! then, when my conscience asks in agony, 'Is there a way of getting rid of my transgressions?' and when my weak will asks, in tremulous indecision, 'Is there a way by which I can shake off the tyranny of this usurping evil power that has fixed its claws in my character and my habits?' then I turn and look to the Christ enthroned at the right hand of power, and I say, 'This Man has offered one sacrifice for sins for ever'; and there, in that calm session at God's right hand, is the attestation that His sacrifice is complete, is sufficient, and is perpetual.

II. We have here the revelation of our Lord's calm repose.

That is expressed, of course, by the very attitude in which, in the symbol, He is represented. Away down in the Egyptian desert there sit, moulded in colossal calm, two giant figures, with hands laid restfully in their laps, and wide-open eyes gazing out over the world. There they have sat for millenniums, the embodiment of majestic repose. So Christ 'sitteth at the right hand of God' rapt in the fulness of eternal calm. But that tranquillity is parallel with the Scriptural representation of the rest of God after creation, which neither indicates previous exhaustion nor connotes present idleness, but expresses the completion of the work and the correspondence of the reality with the ideal which was in the Maker's mind.

In like manner, as I have been trying to point out to you, Christ's rest means the completeness of His finished work, and carries along with it, as that divine rest after creation does in its region, the conception of continuous activity, for just as little as the continuous phenomena of nature can be conceived of, apart from the immanent activity of the ever-working God, and just as the last word of all physical science is that, beneath the so-called causes and so-called forces there must lie a personal will, the only cause known to man, and preservation is a continuous creation, and the changes in nature are the result of the will of the active God, so the past work of Christ, of which He said, when He died, 'It is finished!' is prolonged into, and carried on through, the ages by the continuous activity of the ever-working Christ. 'He sitteth at the right hand of God'; and to that session may be applied in full truth what He said Himself, in the vindication of His work on the Sabbath day—'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

So the dying martyr looked up in the council chamber, and beyond the vaulted roof saw the heavens opened, and with a significant variation in the symbolical attitude, saw 'the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' The seated Christ, we might say, had sprung to His feet, in answer to the dying martyr's faith and prayer, and granted him the vision, not of calm repose, but of intensest activity for his help and sustaining.

The appendix to Mark's Gospel, in like manner, unites these two conceptions of undisturbed tranquillity and of energetic work. For he says that the Lord 'was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God, and they went . . . everywhere preaching the word.' Then did the Commander-in-chief send His soldiers out into the battlefield, and Himself retire to the safe shelter of the hill? By no means. For the two halves of the picture which look so unlike one another—the Lord seated there, and the servants wandering about and toiling here—are brought together into the one solid reality, 'they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord'—seated up yonder—'working with them.' So constant activity is the very essence and inseparable accompaniment of the undisturbed tranquillity of the seated Christ. In other places in Scripture we get the same blending together of the two ideas, as, for instance, when Paul says 'It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And in like manner, in Peter's utterance upon Pentecost, already referred to, you find the same idea. 'Being at the right hand of God exalted, He hath showed forth this which ye now see and hear.' So, working with us, working in us, working for us, working through us, the ever active Christ is with His people, and seated at the right hand of God, shares in all their labours, in all their difficulties, in all their warfare.

III. Lastly, we have here the revelation of Christ's participation in divine power and dominion.

There is a very remarkable and instructive variety in the forms of expression conveying this idea in various parts of the New Testament. We read from His own lips, 'seated at the right hand of power.' We read usually 'at the right hand of God.' We read in this Epistle 'at the right hand of the Majesty of the Highest,' and also 'at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.' So you see our Lord Himself dwelt mainly on the conception of participation in power. And these other passages which I have quoted deal mainly with the conception of the participation in royal authority and dominion. And these two go together.

Then there is another observation to be made, and that is that this sitting at God's right hand is to be interpreted as purely symbolical. For you cannot localise 'the right hand of God.' That 'right hand' is everywhere, wherever the divine power is working. So that, though I, for my part, believe that the human corporeity of Jesus Christ, with which He ascended into the heavens, does abide in a locality, it is not that localisation which is meant by this great symbol of my text, but it is the declaration of a state, rather than of a place—participation in the power that belongs to God, and not a session in a given locality.

There is another remark also to be made, and that is that, according to the full-toned belief of the Christian Church when Jesus Christ in His ascension returned to the Father, from whom He had come, He carried with Him this great difference between His then—that is to say, His present—state, and the pre-incarnate state, viz., that now He has carried into unity with the Father the glorified manhood which He assumed on earth, and there is no difference between the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and the glory in which He now sits. Humanity is thus gathered into divinity.

Now, brethren, I am not going to dwell upon these thoughts, for they go far beyond the powers of my speech; but I am bound by my own conceptions of what Christ Himself has taught us, to reiterate that here we have the plainest teaching, founded on His own express statement, that He is participant of divine fellowship, so close as that it is represented either by being in the bosom of the Father, or by sitting at the right hand of God, and that 'all power is given unto Him in heaven and on earth,' so as that He is the Administrator of the universe. The hands that were pierced with the nails, and into one of which was thrust, in mockery, the reed for a sceptre, now carry the sceptre of the universe, and He is 'King of kings and Lord of lords.' 'He sitteth at the right hand of the Throne of the Majesty in the heavens.'

Now all this should have a very strong practical effect upon us. 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek the things where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.' Oh, brethren! if we carried with us day by day into all our difficulties and struggles, and amidst the glittering fascinations and temptations of this earthly life that great thought, and if we kept the heavens open—for we can do so—and keep before our eyes that vision, how small the difficulties, what molehills the mountains, and how void of charm the seducing temptations would then be! Christ seen—like the popular idea of the sunshine streaming down upon a coal fire—puts out the fuliginous flame of earth's temptations, and dims the kindled brightness of earth's light. And if we really, and not as a mere dogma, had incorporated this faith into our lives, how different that last moment, and what lies beyond it, would look. I do not know how it may be with others, but to me the conception of eternity is chill and awful and repellent; it seems no blessing to live *for ever*. But if we people the waste future with the one figure of the living Christ exalted for us, it all becomes different, and, like the sunrise on snowy summits, the chill heights, not to be trodden by human foot, flash up into rosy beauty that draws men's desires. 'I go to prepare a place for you'; and He prepares it by being there Himself, for then, then it becomes Home. 'And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again, and receive you to Myself, that where I am there ye may be also'—'sitting on My throne, as I overcame, and am sat down with My Father on His throne.'

PERFECTED AND BEING SANCTIFIED

'By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.'
HEB. x. 14.

IN the preceding sentence there is another 'for ever,' which refers to the sacrifice of Christ, and declares its perpetual efficacy. It is one, the world's sins are many, but the single sacrifice is more than all of them. It is a past act, but its consequences are eternal, and flow down through all the ages. The text explains wherein consists the perpetual efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, and the reason why it needs no repetition while the world lasts. It endures for ever, because it has perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

Now, in looking at these words, two things are noteworthy. One is the double designation here of the persons whom Christ influences by His offering, in that they are 'perfected,' and in that they are 'sanctified.' Another is the double aspect of our Lord's work here set forth in regard to time, in that it is, in the first part of the sentence, spoken of as a past act whose consequences endure—'He *hath* perfected'—and in the latter part of our text, according to the accurate rendering, it is spoken of as continuous and progressive, as yet incomplete and going on to perfection. For the text ought to read—'He hath perfected for ever them that are *being* sanctified.' So there you have these two things, the double view of what Christ does, 'perfects' and 'sanctifies,' and the double view of His work, in that in one aspect it is past and complete, and in another aspect it is running on, continuous, and as yet unfinished.

I. First, then, look at the twofold aspect of the effect of Christ's sacrifice.

By it we are 'perfected,' 'sanctified.' Now, these two words, so to speak, cover the same facts, but they look at them from two different points of view. One of them looks at the completed Christian character from the human point of view, and the other looks at it from the divine. For, what does 'perfect' mean in the New Testament? It means, as many a passage might be quoted to show, 'mature,' 'full grown,' in opposition to 'babes in Christ.' This very Epistle uses the two phrases in that antithesis, but the literal meaning of the word is *that which has reached its end*, that which has attained what it was meant to be; and, according to the New Testament teaching, a man is perfected when he has all his capabilities and possibilities of progress and goodness and communion with God made into realities and facts in His life, when the bud has flowered, and the flower has fruited. When capacity is developed, privileges enjoyed, duties attended to, relationships entered into and maintained—when these things have taken place the man is perfect. It is to be observed that there is no reference in the word to any standard outside of human nature. If a man has become all that it is possible for him to be, he is, in the fullest sense, perfect. But Scripture also recognises a relative perfection, as we have already remarked, which consists in a certain maturity of Christian character, and has for its opposite the condition of 'babes in Christ.' So Paul exhorts 'as many as be perfect' to be 'thus minded'—namely, not to count themselves to have apprehended, but to stretch forward to the things which are before, and to press towards the goal which still gleams far in advance.

Consider, now, that other description of a Christian character as 'sanctified.'

The same set of facts in a man's nature is thought of in that word, only they are looked at from another point of view. I suppose I do not need to enlarge upon the fact which, however, I am afraid a great many good people do not realise as they should, that the Biblical notion of 'saint' and 'sanctified' does not begin with character, but with relation, or, if I might put it more plainly, it does not, primarily and to start with, mean 'righteous,' but 'belonging to God.' The Old and the New Testament concur in this conception of 'sanctity,' or 'holiness,' which are the same thing, only one is a Latin word and the other a Teutonic one—namely, that it starts from being consecrated and given up to God, and that out of that consecration will come all manner of righteousness and virtues, beauties of character, and dispositions and deeds which all men own to be 'lovely . . . and of good report. The saint is, first of all, a man who knows that he belongs to God, and is glad to belong to Him, and then, afterwards, he becomes righteous and pure and radiant, but it all starts with yielding myself to God.

So the same set of characteristics which in the word 'perfected' were considered as fulfilling the idea of manhood, as God has given it to us, are massed in this other word, and considered as being the result of our yielding ourselves to Him. That is to say. no man has reached the end which he was created and adapted to reach, unless he has surrendered himself to God. You will never be 'perfected' until you are 'sanctified.'

You must begin with consecration, and then holiness of character, and beauty of conduct, and purity of heart will all come after that. It is vain to put the cart before the horse, and to try to work at mending your characters, before you have set right your relationship to God. Begin with sanctifying, and you will come to perfecting. That is the New Testament teaching. And there is no way of getting to that perfection except, as we shall see, through the one offering.

II. In the next place notice here the completed work.

'By one offering He hath "perfected"' us, the Christian people of this generation, the Christian people yet to be born into the world, the men that have not yet learned that they belong to Him, but who will learn it some day. Were they all 'perfected' eighteen centuries ago? In what sense can that perfecting be said to be a past act? Suppose you take some purifying agent, and throw it in at the headwaters of a river, and it goes down the stream, down and down and down, and by degrees purifies it all. If you like to use long-winded words, you can say that 'potentially' the river was purified when the precipitating agent was flung into it, though its waves were still foul with impurity. Or you can put it into plainer English and say that the past act has its abiding consequences, for there has been thrown into the centre of human history, as it were, that which is amply adequate to the 'perfecting' and the 'sanctifying' of every soul of the race. And that is what the writer of this Epistle means when he says 'He *hath* perfected,' because that sacrifice, like the precipitating agent that I have spoken about, has been flung into the stream of the world's history, and has power to make pure as the dew-drop, or as the water that flows from melting ice, every foul-smelling, darkly dyed drop of the filthy stream.

'By one offering.' Now the word that the writer employs there is a very unusual one in Scripture. He has just been using it in a previous verse, where he speaks about 'the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.' Did you ever notice that remarkable expression 'the offering of the *body*,' not as we usually read, the 'blood.' What does that mean? I think it means this, that the writer is contemplating not only the culminating sacrifice of Calvary, but Christ's offering of Himself all through His earthly life; and knitting together in one the life and the death, the totality of His work, as that by which He has 'perfected for ever all them that are being sanctified.' And that, I think, is made quite certain, because he has just been speaking, and the words of my text refer back to the declaration in one of the psalms 'Lo! I come to do Thy will, O God,' as expressing the whole meaning of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That saying of the psalmist was fulfilled not only on the Cross but in all His daily life.

Jesus Christ, then, in His whole manifestation, in His life, but not only in His life; and in His death, but not only in His death, has offered Himself unto God, 'the Lamb without blemish, and without spot.' And in that offering culminating in the death upon the Cross, but not confined thereto, there does lie the power which is triumphantly more than adequate to deal with all the foulnesses and sins of the world, and to perfect for ever any man that attaches himself to it. It deals with our guilt as nothing else can. It speaks to our consciences as nothing else can. It takes away all the agony and the pain, or all the dogged deadness of a seared conscience. It deals with character. In that great offering, considered as including Christ's life as well as His death, and considered as including Christ's death as well as His life, you have folded up in indissoluble unity the pattern, the motive, and the power for all righteousness of character; and he reaches the end for which God created him, who, laying his hand on the head of that offering, not only transfers his sins to it, but receives its righteousness into him. By one offering that dealt with guilt, and wiped it all out, and that deals with the tyranny of evil, and emancipates us from it, and that communicates to us a new life formed in righteousness after the image of Him that created us, we are delivered from the burden of our sins and perfected, in so far as we lay hold of the power that is meant to cleanse us.

There is no other way of being perfected. You will never reach the point which it is possible for you to attain, and you will never fulfil the purpose for which God made you, unless you have joined yourself by faith to Jesus Christ, and are receiving into your life, and developing in your character, the power which He has lodged in the heart of humanity for redemption and purifying.

III. Now one last word. We have here the continuous and progressive work of Christ, and the growing experience of Christians.

As I have remarked, the last clause of my text would be more completely rendered if we read, 'them that are being sanctified.' The same idea is set forth by the apostle Paul in that solemn passage in the first Epistle to the Corinthians, where he speaks about the double effect of the gospel upon 'them that are perish-ing,' and on 'them that are being saved.' In both cases there is a process going on. The same idea is brought out, too, in the other expression in the Acts of the Apostles, about the 'Lord adding to the Church daily,' not, as the Authorised Version has it, 'such as should be saved,' but 'them that were being saved.' We may speak of salvation as past, as all included in the initial act by which we are knit to Jesus Christ through faith, when as guilty sinners we come to Him and cast ourselves on Him. We may speak of salvation as being future, and lying beyond this vale of tears and battle-field of sins and sorrow. But we can speak of it more accurately than in either of these aspects, as a point in the past, prolonged into a line in the present, and running on into the future. For salvation is a process which is going on day by day, if we are right, and which I am afraid is not progressive in a very great many professing Christian people. Perfected, I said, meant full-grown. I wonder about how many of us it would need to be said, 'Ye are babes in Christ, and when for the time ye ought to be teachers ye have need that one teach you which be the first principles of the oracles of God.' Salvation is a progressive process. That is to say, if we are truly joined to Jesus Christ, we are growingly influenced by the powers of His Cross and the gift of His Spirit. There is no limit to that growth. It is like a spiral which goes up and up and up, and in every convolution draws nearer to the centre, but never reaches it. Our hearts and spirits are wonderfully elastic. They can take in a great deal more of God than we think they can, or than they ever have taken in. We can receive just as much of that infinite Life into our finite spirits as we will. Let us each strive to get more and more of Jesus Christ in us, that we may know Him, and the 'power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings,' more fully, more deeply, and may keep it more constantly.

Oh, brethren! if we are not ascending the ladder that reaches to heaven, which is Christ Himself, we are descending; and if we are not growing we are dwindling; and if we cannot say that we are being sanctified, we are being made more and more common and profane.

I am not going to say one word about whether absolute perfection or absolute sanctification can be reached in this life. If you and I were many hundreds of miles farther on the road, it would be worth discussing whether we could reach the goal or not. Never mind about the possibilities of abstract and perfect sanctification, we are a good long way off that. Look after the next step in advance, and leave the ultimate one to take care of itself. Only remember, that whilst Christ's past work has in it perpetual and absolute power to make any man perfect, no man will be sanctified unless he is sanctified by 'faith that is in Me,' and by the effort to work into his life and character the gift of the Divine Spirit and of the life of Christ which he receives by faith. It is 'them that are being sanctified' to whom the large hopes of this great text apply, and who may be sure that one day they will be absolutely perfected.

A BETTER AND AN ENDURING SUBSTANCE

'Knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.'—HEB. x. 34.

THE words 'in heaven' are probably no part of the original text, but have somehow or other crept in, in order to make more plain what some one supposed to be the reference of these words to the future inheritance of the saints. They, however, rather disturb than help the writer's thought. He is speaking of a present and not of a future possession. 'Ye have,' and not 'ye shall have,' a better and an 'enduring possession,' not in heaven, but here and now.

But even if these words be expelled from the text as disturbing the writer's thought, there still remains a variation in the reading of some importance. It is a very slight difference of form in the original, but the two meanings between which we have to choose are these: 'Knowing that ye have yourselves as a better and an enduring possession'; *or*, 'a better and an enduring possession for yourselves.' I am inclined rather to the former of the two, both from external authority and internal congruity, though the choice between them is difficult. But, if we accept this as the meaning of these words, we can gather from them important lessons, of which I ask your consideration.

I. The true possession.

If we adopt the other reading, and take the words to mean that, in so far as we are truly resting on Jesus, we have for ourselves an inheritance or possession better than all external ones, the text will then be pointing to the old thought that God is the true joy and treasure of a man's soul. If, on the other hand, we may venture to adopt the other meaning, there is great depth and beauty in it, representing, as it does, the Christian as having himself as a treasure. It may strike one as strange, but a little consideration will show its truth and perfect harmony with the other thought, that God is the treasure of every soul which is not poor and in need of all things. 'A good man shall be satisfied from himself,' says the Book of Proverbs, and that is no arrogant denial of the need for God, but completely accords with the devout acknowledgment, 'All my springs are in Thee.' In the very same chapter as our text we read: 'We are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of their souls,' which might be more accurately rendered, 'to the acquisition as their own of their souls.' Remember, too, our Lord's words: 'In your patience ye shall acquire possession of your souls.' If we take these sayings into account, we need not hesitate to admit that, at all events, there is a great deal to be said for the somewhat remarkable expression in the text.

It just comes to this. No man possesses himself until he has given up himself. We only own ourselves when we have parted with ourselves. Until we have yielded ourselves in acts of dependent faith and rejoicing love and docile obedience unto God, we have no real possession of ourselves. He, and only he, who says, 'I give myself away to Thee,' gets himself back again sanctified, gladdened, ennobled, and on the way to be perfected by his surrender and God's reception.

We own ourselves only on condition of being Christian men. For, under all other circumstances and forms of life, the true self is domineered over and brought into slavery and dragged away from its proper bearings by storms and swarms of lusts and passions and inclinations and ambitions and senses. A man's flesh is his master, or his pride is his master, or some fraction of his nature is his master, and he himself is an oppressed slave, tyrannised over by rebellious powers. The only way to get the mastery of yourselves, to be able to keep a tight hand upon all inferior parts of your nature, and to have that self-command and self-possession without which there is nothing noble in life, is to go to God and say, 'Oh, Lord! I cannot rule this anarchic being of mine. Do Thou take it into Thine hands. Here are the reins: do with me what Thou wilt.' Then you will be your own masters, not till then. Then you will own yourselves; till then, the devil and the world and the flesh, and the pomps and prides and passions and lusts and lazinesses that are in your nature will own you. But if we have exercised the faith which casts itself wholly upon God, we therein and thereby win God and our own selves also, and that is one of the meanings of 'saving our own souls.'

Or, to put it in another light, the only things worth calling treasures and possessions are true thoughts that we have learned from God; pure affections that go out to Him; yearning desires after Him, which, in their very yearning, bear the prophecy, and are to a large extent the foretaste, of their own fruition.

These are the things that make a man's treasure. The inner life of obedience, of love, of trust, the conscience cleansed, the will made plastic and docile, the heart filled with all pure and heavenward affections, aspirations that lift us above self and time, and bring us into the sweet and calm light of the Eternal Love whose name is God—these are the possessions which are worth possessing. And he, and only he, has such who has found them in lowly submission of his sinful self to Christ who has died that our spirits might be cleansed and given back unto us.

Brethren, the realisation of this possession of ourselves depends on our faith. Stoics and moralists and lofty souled men in all ages have talked about the true possession of oneself, which comes by self-surrender and annihilation, but Christian faith realises the dream, and they only find the reality who pass towards it through the gate of trust in Jesus Christ. Then, and only then, will the old English poet's lovely picture be fulfilled, and the man's soul

'Made free from slavish bands,
Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;
Lord of himself, though not of lands;
And having nothing, yet hath all'

II. Note, again, how here we hear asserted the superiority of this possession.

It is 'better' in its essential quality. That does not need many words. Surely these possessions of heart and mind and will and desires all brought into fellowship with and filled by God are things more correspondent with the nature of man and his needs than any accumulation of outward possessions can ever be. And surely it is a plain piece of prose, and no exaggerated religious enthusiasm, which says, 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee.' Men call it mysticism. It is the very foundation of all true religion. The apprehension of union with God is the one thing that will satisfy the soul; the one thing that we need, which having, we cannot be wholly desolate, however dark may be our path, nor wholly solitary, however lonely may be our lot, nor utterly bereaved, however blessings may be dragged from our hands; and without which we cannot be at rest, however compassed with stays and succours and treasures and friends; nor rich, however we may have bursting coffers and all things to enjoy.

The possession which we carry within us is better than any which we can gather round us. 'Surely he is disquieted in vain, he heapeth up treasures'—and the very fact that they need to be 'heaped,' and that that is all that he can do with them, shows the vanity of the disquiet that raked them together. Not what a man has, but what a man is, is his wealth.

And the better treasure is an enduring possession. That is the second element of its excellence. These things, the calm joys, the pure delights of still fellowship with God in heart and mind and will—these things have in them no seed of decay. These cannot be separated from their possessor by anything but his own unfaithfulness. There will never come the time when they shall have to be left behind. Use does not wear these out, but strengthens and increases them. The things which are destined 'to perish with the using' belong to an inferior category. All the best things are intended and destined to increase with the using, and this treasure, the more it is expended the fuller is the coffer, and the more we exercise the love, the communion, the obedience which make our true riches, the more do the riches increase. And then when all other things drop from their nerveless hands; and 'His glory'—whose glory was in outward things—

'shall not descend after him,' we shall carry these treasures with us wherever we go, and find that they were the pledge of immortality.

III. My text, lastly, suggests to us the quiet superiority to earthly loss and change which the possession of this treasure involves.

The writer is speaking to Christian men who have endured a great fight of afflictions, and he says of them, 'Ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, because you knew that you had this better and enduring substance.' Joyfully! When you strike away the false props the strength of the real ones becomes more conspicuous. And many and many a time we may experience, unless we waste our discipline and our sorrows, that the surest way to become richer towards God is to lose the earthly stays and supports. But whether that be so or no, he who sits in the centre, and has the light round him, need not mind much what storms are raging without, and he whose inexpugnable fortress is within the depths of God may smile at all the hubbub and confusion down in the valley. If we possess this true treasure which lies at our doors, and may be had for the taking, we shall be like men in some strong fortress, with firm walls, abundant provisions, and a well in the courtyard, and we can laugh at besiegers. 'His abiding place shall be the munitions of rocks; his bread shall be given him and his water shall be made sure.' We may be quiet and lofty, infinitely above the fear of chance and change, if we keep the firm hold which we may keep of the enduring riches which God brings with Him into our souls.

Some of you may be in circumstances which make such thoughts as these specially applicable, either because dark days may be threatening, or because the sunshine of prosperity may be dazzling some eyes and making them lose sight of their true wealth. To the one class the thought of my text is gathered up in the warning, 'Charge them that they trust not in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God.' And, to the other class, the text should quicken and consolidate the resolve, 'What time I am afraid I will trust in Thee. Thou art the strength of my heart, and mine inheritance for ever.'

HOW TO OWN OURSELVES

'Them that believe to the saving of the soul.'—HEB. x. 39.

THE writer uses a somewhat uncommon word in this clause, which is not altogether adequately represented by the translation 'saving.' Its true force will be apparent by comparing one or two of the few instances in which it occurs in the New Testament. For example, it is twice employed in the Epistles to the Thessalonians; in one case being rendered, 'God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain' (or, more correctly, to *the obtaining of*) 'salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ'; and in another, 'called to the obtaining of glory through Jesus Christ.' It is employed twice besides in two other places of Scripture, and in both of these it means 'possession.' So that, though practically equivalent to the idea of salvation, there is a very beautiful shade of difference which is well worth noticing.

The thought of the text is substantially this—those who believe *win* their souls; they acquire them for their possession. We talk colloquially about 'people that cannot call their souls their own.' That is a very true description of all men who are not lords of themselves through faith in Jesus Christ. 'They who believe to the gaining of their own souls' is the meaning of the writer here.

And I almost think that we may trace in this peculiar expression an allusion, somewhat veiled but real, to similar words of our Lord's. For He said, when, like the writer in the present context, He was encouraging His disciples to steadfastness in the face of difficulties and persecutions, 'In your patience'—in your persistent adherence to Me, whatever might draw you away,—'ye shall win'—not merely *possess*, as our Bible has it, and not a commandment, but a promise—'in your patience ye shall win your souls.' Whether that allusion be sustainable or no matters comparatively little; it is the significant and beautiful thought which underlies the word to which I wish to turn, and to present you with some illustrations of it.

I. First, then, if we *lose* ourselves we *win* ourselves.

All men admit in theory that a self-centred life is a blunder. Jesus Christ has all moralists and all thoughtful men wholly with Him when He says, 'He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life shall find it.' There is no such way of filling a soul with enlargement and blessedness and of evolving new powers and capacities as self-oblivion for some great cause, for some great love, for some great enthusiasm. Many a woman has found herself when she held her child in her arms, and in the self-oblivion which comes from maternal affections and cares has sprung into a loftier new life. Many a heart, of husband and wife, can set its seal to this truth, that the blessedness of love is that it decentralises the soul, and substitutes another aim for the wretched and narrow one that is involved in self-seeking. And even if we do not refer to these sacred heights of maternal or of wedded love, there are many other noble counterpoises to the degrading influence of self-absorption, which all men recognise and some men practise. Whoever has once tasted the joy and rapture of flinging himself into some great enthusiasm, and has known how much fuller life is when so inspired than in its ordinary forms, needs no words to convince him that the secret of blessedness, elevation, and power. if it is to be put into one great word, must be put into this one, 'self-oblivion.'

But whilst all these counterpoises to the love of self are, in their measure and degree, great and noble and blessed, not one of them, nor all of them put together, will so break the fetters from off a prisoned soul and let it out into the large place of utter and glad self-oblivion as the course which our text enjoins upon us when it says: If you wish to forget yourselves, to abandon and lose yourselves, fling yourselves into Christ's arms, and by faith yield your whole being, will, trust, purposes, aims, everything—yield them all to Him; and when you can say, 'We are not our own,' then first will you belong to yourselves and have won your own souls.

There is nothing except that absolute departure from all reliance upon our own poor powers, and from all making of ourselves our centre and aim in life, which gives us true possession of ourselves. Nothing else is comparable to the talismanic power of trust in Jesus Christ. When thus we lose ourselves in Him we find ourselves, and find Him in ourselves.

I believe that, at bottom, a life must either spin round on its own axis, self-centred and self-moved, or else it must be drawn by the mass and weight and mystical attractiveness of the great central sun, and swept clean out of its own little path to become a satellite round Him. Then only will it move in music and beauty, and flash back the lustre of an unfading light. Self or God, one or other will be the centre of every human life.

It is well to be touched with lofty enthusiasms; it is well to conquer self in the eager pursuit of some great thought or large subject of study; it is well to conquer self in the sweetness of domestic love; but through all these there may run a perverting and polluting reference to myself. Affection may become but a subtle prolongation of myself, and study and thought may likewise be tainted, and even in the enthusiasm for a great cause there may mingle much of self-regard; and on the whole there is nothing that will sweep out, and keep out, the seven devils of selfishness except to yield yourselves to God, drawn by His mercies, and say, 'I am not my own; I am bought with a price.' Then, and only then, will you belong to yourselves.

II. Secondly, if we will take Christ for our Lord we shall be lords of our own souls.

I have said that self-surrender is self-possession. It is equally true that self-control is self-possession; and it is as true about this application of my text as it was about the former, that Christianity only says more emphatically what moralists say, and suggests and supplies a more efficient means of accomplishing the end which they all recognise as good. For everybody knows that the man who is a slave to his own passions, lusts, or desire is not his own master. And everybody knows that the man who is the sport of circumstance, and yields to every temptation that comes sweeping round him, as bamboos bend before every blast; or the man who is guided by fashion, conventionality, custom, and the influence of the men amongst whom he lives, and whom he calls 'the world,' is not his own master. He 'dare not call his soul his own.'

What do we mean by being self-possessed, except this, that we can so rule our more fluctuating and sensitive parts as that, notwithstanding appeals made to them by external circumstances, they do not necessarily yield to these? He possesses himself who, in the face of antagonism, can do what is right; who, in the face of temptation, will not do what is wrong; who can dare to be in the right with one or two; and who is not moulded by circumstances, howsoever they may influence him, but reacts upon them as a hammer, and is not as an anvil. And this superiority over the parts of my nature which are meant to be kept down, and this assertion of independent power in the face of circumstances, and this freedom from the dominion of cliques and parties and organs of opinion and loud voices round us, this is best secured in its fulness and completeness by the path which my text suggests.

Trust in Jesus Christ, and let Him be your Commander-in-chief, and you have won your souls. Let Him dominate them, and you can dominate them. If you will give your wills into His hands, He will give them back to you and make you able to subdue your passions and desires. Put the reins into Christ's hands and say, 'Here, O Lord, guide Thou the horses and the chariot, for I cannot coerce them, but Thou canst.' Then He will come and bring a new ally in the field, and cast a new weight into the scale, and you will no longer be the slave of the servile and inferior parts of your nature; nor be kicked about, the football of circumstances; nor be the echo of some other body's views, but you will have a voice of your own, and a will of your own, and a soul of your own, because you have given them to Christ, and He will help you to control them. Such a man—and I verily believe, from the bottom of my heart, such a man only—in the fullest sense, is

> 'Free from slavish bands,
> Of hope to rise, or fear to fall;
> Lord of himself, though not of lands;
> And having nothing, yet hath all.'

What does some little rajah, on the edge of our great Indian Empire, do when troubled with rebels whom he cannot subdue? He goes and makes himself a feudatory of the great central power at Calcutta, and then down comes a regiment or two, and makes very short work of the rebellion that the little kinglet could do nothing with. If you go to Christ and say to Him, 'Dear Lord, I take my crown from my head and lay it at Thy feet. Come Thou to help me to rule this anarchic realm of my own soul,' you will win yourself.

III. Thirdly, if we have faith in Christ we acquire a better self.

The thing that most thoughtful men and women feel, after they have gone a little way into life, is not so much that they want to possess themselves, as that they want to get rid of themselves—of all the failures and shame and disappointment and futility of their lives. That desire may be accomplished. We cannot strip ourselves of ourselves by any effort. The bitter old past keeps living on, and leaves with us seeds of weakness and memories that sometimes corrupt, and always enfeeble: memories that seem to limit the possibilities of the future in a tragic fashion. Ah, brethren! we can get rid of ourselves; and, instead of continuing the poor, sin-laden, feeble creatures that we are, we can have pouring into our souls the gift most real—though people nowadays, in their shallow religion, call it mystical—of a new impulse and a new life. The old individuality will remain, but new tastes, new aspirations, aversions, hopes, and capacities to realise them may all be ours, so that 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature'; and in barter for the old garment he receives the robe of righteousness. You can lose yourselves, in a very deep and earnest sense, if, trusting in Jesus Christ, you open the door of the heart to the influx of that new life which is His best gift. Faith wins a better self, and we may each experience, in all its fulness and blessedness, the paradox of the apostle when he said, 'I live' now, at last, in triumphant possession of this better life: 'I live' *now*—I only existed before—'yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.' And with Christ in me I first find myself.

IV. Lastly, if by faith we win our souls here, we save them from destruction hereafter.

I have said that the word of my text is substantially equivalent to the more frequent and common expression 'salvation'; though with a shade of difference, which I have been trying to bring out. And this substantial equivalence is more obvious if you will note that the text is the second member of an antithesis of which the first is, 'we are not of them which draw back into perdition.'

So, then, the writer sets up, as exact opposites of one another, these two ideas—perdition or destruction on the one hand, and the saving or winning of the soul on the other. Therefore, whilst we must give due weight to the considerations which I have already been suggesting, we shall not grasp the whole of the writer's meaning unless we admit also the thought of the future. And that the same blending of the two ideas, of possession and salvation in the more usual sense of the word, was implied in the Lord's saying, of which I have suggested there may be an echo here, is plain if you observe that the version in St. Luke gives the text which I have already quoted: 'In your patience ye shall win your souls'; and that of St. Matthew, in the same connection, gives, instead, the saying, 'he that *endureth*'—which corresponds with *patience*—'he that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.'

So, then, brethren, you cannot be said to have won your souls if you are only keeping them for destruction, and such destruction is clearly laid down here as the fate of those who turn away from Jesus Christ.

Now, it seems to me that no fair interpretation can eject from that word 'perdition,' or 'destruction,' an element of awe and terror. However you may interpret the ruin, it is ruin utter of which it speaks. And I am very much afraid that in this generation eager discussions about the duration of punishment, and the final condition of those who die impenitent, have had a disastrous influence on a great many minds and consciences in reference to this whole subject, by making it rather a subject of controversy than a solemn truth to be pondered. However the controversies be settled, there is terror enough left in that word to make us all bethink ourselves.

I lay it on your hearts, dear friends—it is no business of mine to say much about it, but I lay it on your hearts and on my own; and I beseech you to ponder it. Do not mix it up with wholly independent questions as to what is to become of people who never heard about Jesus Christ. 'The Judge of all the earth will do right.' What this verse says applies to people that *have* heard about Him—that is, to you and me—and to people that do not accept Him—and that is some of us; and about them it says that they 'draw back unto perdition.'

Now, remember, the alternative applies to each of us. It is a case of 'either—or' in regard to us all. If we have taken Christ for our Saviour, and, as I said, put the reins into His hands and given ourselves to Him by love and submission and confidence, then we own our souls, because we have given them to Him to keep, 'and He is able to keep that which is committed to Him against that day.'

But I am bound to tell you, in the plainest words I can command, that if you have not thus surrendered yourself to Jesus Christ, His sacrifice, His intercession, His quickening Spirit, then I know not where you are to find one foothold of hope that upon you there will not come down the overwhelming fate that is darkly portrayed in that one solemn word.

Oh, brethren! let us all ponder the question, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?'

SEEKING GOD

'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'—HEB. xi. 6.

THE writer has been pointing to the patriarch Enoch as the second of these examples of the power of faith in the Old Covenant; and it occurs to him that there is nothing said in Genesis about Enoch's faith, so he sets about showing that he must have had faith, because he 'walked with God,' and pleased Him, and no man could thus walk with God, and please Him, unless he had come to Him, and no man could come to a God in whom he did not believe, and whom he did not believe to be waiting to help and bless him, when he did come. So the facts of Enoch's life show that there must have been in him an underlying faith. That is all that I need to say about the context of the words before us. I am not going to speak of the writer's argument, but only of this one aspect of the divine character which is brought out here. 'He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.'

I. Now a word about the seeking.

'Seek?' Do we need to seek? Not in the way in which people go in quest of a thing that they have lost and do not know where to find. We do not need to search; we do not need to seek. The beginning of all our seeking is that God has sought us in Jesus Christ, and so we have done for ever with: 'Oh! that I knew where I might find Him.' We have done for ever with 'feeling after Him, if haply we might find Him. That is all past. We have to seek, but let us never forget that we must have been found of Him, before we seek Him. That is to say, He must have revealed Himself to us in the fulness and reality and solid certainty of His existence and character, before there can be kindled in any heart or mind the desire to possess Him. He must have flashed His light upon the eye before the eye beholds; and He must have stimulated the desire by the revelation of Himself which comes before all desires, ere any of us will stir ourselves up to lay hold upon God. Ours, then, is not to be a doubtful search, but a certain seeking, that goes straight to the place where it knows that its treasure is, just as a migratory bird will set out from the foggy and ice-bound shores of the north, and go straight through the mists and the night, over continents and oceans, to a place where it never was before, but to which it is led—God only knows how—by some deep instinct, too deep to be an error, and too persistent not to find its resting-place. That is how we are to seek. We are to seek as the flower turns its opening petals to the sunshine, making no mistake as to the quarter of the heaven in which the radiance is lodged. We have to seek, as the rootlet goes straight to the river, knowing where the water is, from which life and sap will come. Thus we have to seek where and what we know. Our quest is no doubtful and miserable hunting about for a possible good, but an earnest desire for a certain and a solid blessing. That is the seeking.

Let us put it into two or three plain words. The prime requisite of the Christian's seeking after God is as the writer here says, faith. I need not dwell upon that. 'Must believe that He is'—yes; of course. We do not seek after negations or hypotheses; we seek after a living Being. 'And that He is the Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him'—yes; if we were not sure that we should find what we wanted, we should never go to look for it. But, beyond all that, let me put three things as included in, and necessary to, the Christian seeking—desire, effort, prayer. We seek what we desire. But too many of us do not wish God, and would not know what to do with Him if we had Him, and would be very much embarrassed if it were possible for the full blessings which come along with Him, to be entrusted to our slack hands and unloving hearts. Brethren, we call ourselves Christians; let us be honest with ourselves, and rigid in the investigation of the thoughts of our own hearts. Is there a wish for God there? Is there an aching void in His absence, or do we shovel cartloads of earthly rubbish into our hearts, and thus dull desires that can be satisfied only with Him? These are not questions to which any one has a right to expect an answer from another; they are not questions that any Christian man can safely shirk answering to himself and to God. The measure of our seeking is actually settled by the measure of our desire.

Then effort, of course, follows desire as surely as the shadow comes after the substance, because the only purpose of our desires, in the constitution of our nature, is to supply the driving power for effort. They are the steam in the boiler intended to whirl round the wheels. And so for a man to desire a thing that he can do nothing whatever to bring about, is misery and folly. But for a man to desire, and not to work towards fulfilling his desire, is greater misery and greater stupidity. One cannot believe in the genuineness of those devout aspirations that one hears in people's prayers, who get up and wipe the dust off their knees, and go out into the world, and do nothing to bring about the fulfilment of their prayers. There is a great deal of that sort of desire amongst professing Christians in all churches, conventional utterances which are backed up and verified by no corresponding conduct. If we are seeking after God, we shall not let all the seeking effervesce in pious aspirations; it will get consolidated into corresponding action, and operate to keep thought and love directed towards Him, even amidst the trivialities, and legitimate duties, and great things of life. There will be effort to bring

Him into connection with all our work; effort to keep by Him as we go about our daily tasks, if we are truly seeking after God.

And then, desire and effort being pre-supposed, there will come honest prayers, genuine prayers. 'Seek ye the Lord while He may be found,' says the prophet, and immediately goes on to exhort us to 'call upon Him while He is near,' as one and the chief way of seeking Him. He is always near, closer to us than friends and lovers, closer to us than our eyes and hands, near in His Son and the Spirit, near to hear and to bless, near and desiring to be nearer, yea to be blended with our being and to dwell in us and we in Him. We have not only to desire His gift, and to work towards it, but to ask for it. Then, if we exercise these three activities of desire, effort, petition, we may truly say: 'When Thou saidst, "Seek ye My face," my heart said unto Thee, "Thy face, Lord! will I seek,"' and may go on, as the psalmist did, to offer the consequent prayer: 'Hide not Thy face from me,' in full assurance that He is found by every seeking soul. So much for the seeking.

II. Now a word about the diligence in seeking.

The writer uses a very strong expression, one word in the original, which is here adequately rendered, 'them that diligently seek Him.' Half-hearted seeking finds nothing. You sometimes say to your children, when you have set them to look for anything, and they come back and say they have not been able to find it, 'You do not know how to seek.' And that is true about a great many of us. Half and half desire, so that one eye is turned on earth, and the other lifted up now and then to heaven, does not bring us much. It will bring a little, but not the fulness of blessing which follows on whole-hearted, continuous, persevering seeking. If you hold a cup below a tap, in an unsteady hand, sometimes it is under the whole rush of the water, and sometimes is on one side, and it will be a long time before you get it filled. There will be much of the water spilled. God pours Himself upon us, and we hold our vessels with unsteady hands, and twitch them away sometimes, and the bright blessing falls on the ground and cannot be gathered up, and our cup is empty, and our lips parched. Interrupted seeking will find little; perfunctory seeking will find less. Conventional religion brings very little blessing, very little consciousness of the presence of God; and that is why so many who call themselves Christians, and are so, in a measure and in a sense, know so little of the joy of being found of God. They have sought but not sought diligently.

Now let us take the rebuke to ourselves, if we need it, and we all need it more or less. It is a very threadbare piece of Christian counsel, to be earnest in our seeking after God, but it is none the less needed because it is threadbare, and it would not be threadbare if it had not been so much needed. 'They that search *diligently*'—which is the real meaning of the words in the Book of Proverbs rendered, 'they that seek Me *early*'—'shall find Me.'

III. So this brings me to the last thing here, the Rewarder and the reward.

'He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.' The best reward of seeking is to find the thing that you are looking for. So the best reward that God, the Rewarder, gives is when He gives Himself. There are a great many other good things that come to the diligently seeking Christian soul, but the best thing is that God draws near. Enoch sought God, came to God, and so he walked with God. The reward of his coming was continuous, calm communion, which gave him a companion in solitude, and one to walk at his side all through the darkness and the roughnesses, as well as the joys and the smoothnesses, of daily life.

Ah, brethren! there is no reward comparable to the felt presence in our own quiet hearts of the God who has found us, and whom we have found. And if we have that, then He becomes, here and now, the reward of the diligent search, and the reward of it to-day carries in itself the assurance of the perfect reward of the coming time. 'He walked with God, and . . . God took him.' That will be true of all of us. There is only one seeking in life that is sure to result in the finding of what we seek. All other search—the quest after the chief good—if it runs in any other direction, is resultless and barren. But there is one course, and one only, in which the result is solid and certain. 'I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, seek ye My face in vain.' If we seek He will be found of us, and so be our Rewarder and our reward.

NOAH'S FAITH AND OURS

'By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house.'—HEB. xi. 7.

THE creed of these Old Testament saints was a very short one, and very different from ours. Their faith was the very same. It is the great object of the writer of this Epistle, in this magnificent catalogue of the heroes of the faith, the muster roll of God's great army, to establish the principle that from the beginning there has only been one kind of religion, only one way to God; and that, however rudimentary and brief the articles of belief in those early days, the faculty by which these far-away believers lay hold on them, and its practical issues, were identical in them and in us, And that is a principle well worth getting into our minds, that the scope of the creed has nothing to do with the essence of the faith.

So we may look at this instance and discern in it, beneath all superficial differences, the underlying identities, and take this dim, half-intelligible figure of Noah, as he stands almost on the horizon of history, as being an example for us, in very vivid fashion, of the true object of faith, its operation in a two-fold fashion, and its vindication.

I. Look first at Noah's faith in regard to its object.

If we think of the incident brought before us in these words, we shall see how the confidence with which Noah laid hold of a dim future, about which he knew nothing, except because God had spoken to him, was, at bottom, identical with that great attitude of the soul which we call faith, as it is exercised towards Jesus Christ.

No doubt in this Epistle to the Hebrews, the aspect of faith by which it lays hold of the future and the unseen, is the one on which the writer's mind is mainly fixed. But notice, that whilst the near object, so to speak, to which Noah stretched out his hands, and of which he laid hold, was that coming catastrophe, with its certainties of destruction and of deliverance; there was only one reason why he knew anything about that, and there was only one reason why he knew or believed anything about it, and that was because he believed Him who had told him. So at bottom, God who had revealed the unseen future to him was the object of his faith. He trusted the Person, therefore he believed in that Person's word, and therefore he had the assured realisation of things not seen as yet; and the future, so dim and uncertain to unaided eyes, became to him as certain as the past, and expectation as reliable as memory. His faith grasped the invisible things to come, only because it grasped the Invisible Person, who was, is, and is to come, and who lifted for him the curtain and showed him the things that should be. So is it with our faith; whether it lays hold upon a past sacrifice on Calvary, or upon a present Christ dwelling in our hearts, or whether it becomes telescopic, and stretches forward into the future, and brings the distant near, all its various aspects are but aspects of one thing, and that is personal trust in the personal Christ who speaks to us. What he says is a matter of secondary importance in this respect. The contents of God's revelation vary; the act by which man accepts them is always the same.

So the great question for us all is—do we trust God? Do we believe Him, and therefore accept His words, not only with the assent of the understanding, which of all idle things is the idlest, but do we believe Him, revealing, commanding, promising, threatening, with the trust and affiance of our whole hearts? Then, and then only, can we look with quiet certainty into the dim future, which else is all full of rolling clouds, that sometimes shape themselves to our imaginations into the likeness of stable things, but alas! change and melt while we gaze. Only then can we front the solemn future, and say: 'I do not expect only, I *know* what is there.' My brother, if our faith is worth calling faith at all, it rests so absolutely and confidingly upon God, that His bare word becomes to us the infallible source of certitude with regard to all the shifting hours of time, and to the steadfast day of an eternity, whose change is blessed growth to an unreached and undeclining noon.

And what was the future that loomed before this man? The coming of a destruction as certain as God, and the coming of a deliverance as complete as His love could make it. Never mind although Noah's outlook related but to a temporary catastrophe, and ours has reference to an eternal condition of things. That is a difference of no real moment. We have what Noah had, a definite, divine utterance, as the source of all our knowledge of what is coming. Both are alike in having two sides, one dark and menacing with a certain destruction, the other radiant and lustrous with as certain a deliverance. And now the question for each of us is, do I so believe God that that future is to me what it was to this man—far more real than these fleeing illusions that lie nearer me?

When Noah walked the earth and saw his contemporaries busy with buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage, how fantastic and unreal their work must have seemed to him, when behind them he saw blazing a vision, which he alone of all that multitude believed. Do not let us fancy that we have faith if these near trifles are to us the great realities, and the distance is dim, and unsubstantial, and doubtful, hidden in mist and forgotten. The years that stretched between the divine utterance and its fulfilment were to this man as nothing, and for him the unseen was the reality, and the seen was the shadowy and phantasmal. And that is what faith worth calling the name will always do for men. Ask yourselves the question if your dim apprehension of that future, in either of its aspects, is anything so vivid as the certitude which blazed ever before the eye of this man. One of our old English writers says, 'If the felicities of another world were as closely apprehended as the joys of this, it were martyrdom to live.' That may be an exaggeration, but surely, surely there is something wrong in men who call themselves believers in God and His word, to whom the things seen and temporal are all or nearly all important, and the trifles an inch from their eyes are big enough to shut out heaven and all its stars.

II. Still further, notice Noah's faith in its practical effects.

If faith has any reality in us at all, it works. If it has no effect it has no existence. The writer points out two operations of this confidence in God which, through belief in His word, leads to a realisation of a remote and unseen future. The effects are two-fold. First on Noah's disposition, faith produced appropriate emotion, excited by the belief in the coming deluge; he was 'moved with fear.' Then, secondly, through emotion, faith influenced conduct—he 'prepared an ark.' This is the order in which faith ever works.

If real and strong, it will first affect emotion. By 'fear' here we are not merely to understand, though possibly it is not to be excluded, a dread of personal consequences, but much rather the sweet and lofty emotion which is described in another part of this same book by the same word: 'Let us serve Him with reverence and with godly fear.' It is the fear of pious regard, of religious awe, of reverence which has love blended inseparably with it, and is not merely a tremulous apprehension of some mischief coming to me. Noah had no need for that self-regarding 'fear,' inasmuch as one half of his knowledge of the future was the knowledge of his own absolute safety. But reverence, the dread of going against his Father's will, lowly submission, and all analogous and kindred sentiments, are expressed by the word.

Such holy and blessed emotion, which has no torment, is the sure result of real faith. Unless a man's faith is warm enough to melt his heart, it is worth very little. A faith unaccompanied by emotion is, I was going to say worse, at any rate it is quite as bad, as a faith which is all wasted in emotion. It is not a good thing when all the steam roars out through an escape pipe; it is perhaps a worse thing when there is no steam in the boiler to escape. It is easy for people that have not any religion to scoff at what they suppose to be the fanatical excess of emotion which some forms of religious belief develop. I, for my part, would rather have the extremest emotion than a dead cold orthodoxy, that believes everything and feels nothing. There is some hope in the one; the other is only fit to be buried. Do not be afraid of feeling which is the child of faith. Be very much more afraid of a religion that leaves your heart beating just exactly at the same rate that it did before you took the truth into it. I am very, very sure that there is no road, between a man's faith and his practice, except through his heart, and that, as the Apostle has it in a somewhat different form of speech, meaning, however, the same thing that I am now insisting upon, 'faith worketh by love.' Love is the path through which creed travels outward to conduct.

So we come to the second and more remote effect of faith. Emotion will lead to action. 'Moved with fear he prepared an ark.' If emotion be the child of faith, conduct is the child of emotion. Noah's faith, then, led him to a line of action that separated him from the men around him; and it led him to a protracted labour in preparation for a remote end, for the coming of which he had no guarantee except what he believed to be God's word. Commentators calculate that there were a hundred and twenty years between the time of the divine command and the Flood. Think of how this man, for all that long while, set himself to his task, and how many clever speeches would be made, proving that he was a fool, and how many witty gibes would come showering around his head like hail. But he kept steadily on, on a line of conduct which made him singular, and which had regard only to that result a hundred and twenty years off.

Now, is that what you and I are doing? Does our faith so shape our lives that whatever we are about, there is still regard to that far-off future? If you meet a man in the street, hurrying somewhere to welcome a friend expected to arrive from a far-off land, and you detain him in conversation, as you speak he is impatient, keeps looking over your shoulder down the road to see if there is any sign of his coming. That is how we should be acting here—doing our work and sticking to our tasks, but ever letting expectation and desire carry us onwards to that great future, which has already set out from the throne in Eternity, and is speeding towards us even now. Let that future, dear brethren, stand so clear before each of us, that it shall shape our whole work in the present. We shall mould all our lives with reference to it, if we are wise. For what we make our present, that will our future be. The smaller ends for which men live, and the nearer futures which they struggle towards, lose no jot of their worth by being regarded as but means to that far greater end. Rather, time is only redeemed from triviality, when it is seen to be the preparation for eternity, and earth is never so fair and good as when we discern and use it as the vestibule of heaven. Never mind being singular. He is the wise man whose vision reaches as far as his existence, and whose earthly life has for the end of its effort, to please Christ and be found in Him.

III. And so, lastly, let me point to Noah's faith, in regard to its vindication.

'He condemned the world.' 'The world' thought him wasting life foolishly. No doubt there were plenty of witty and wise things said about him. 'Prudent, far-sighted, practical men' would say, 'How fanatical! What a misuse of energies and opportunities'; and so forth. And then, one morning, the rain began, and continued, and for forty days it did not stop, and they began to think that perhaps, after all, there was some method in his madness. Noah got into his ark, and still it rained, and I wonder what the wits and 'practical men,' that had treated the whole thing as moonshine and folly, thought about it all then, with the water up to their knees. How their gibes and jests would die in their throats when it reached their lips!

And so, my dear friends, the faith of the poor, ignorant old woman that up in her garret lives to serve Jesus Christ, and to win an eternal crown, will get its vindication some day, and it will be found out then which was the 'practical' man and the wise man, and all the witty speeches and smart sayings will seem very foolish even to their authors, when the light of that future shines on them. And the old word will come true once more, that the man who lives for the present, and for anything bounded by Time, will have to 'leave it in the midst of his days,' and 'at his latter end shall be a fool,' whilst the 'foolish' man who lived for the future, when the future has come to the present, and the present has dwindled away into the past, and sunk beneath the horizon, shall be proved to be wise, and shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.

THE CITY AND THE TENT

'Dwelling in tabernacles . . . for he looked for a city.'—HEB. xi. 9, 10.

THE purpose of the great muster-roll of the ancient heroes of Judaism in this chapter is mainly to establish the fact that there has never been but one way to God. However diverse the degrees of knowledge and the externals, the essence of religion has always been the same. So the writer of this Epistle, to the great astonishment, no doubt, of some of the Hebrews to whom it was addressed, puts out his hand, and claims, as Christians before Christ, all the worthies of whom they were nationally so proud. He is speaking here about the three patriarchs. Whether he conceives them to have all lived on the earth at one time or no, does not trouble us at all. 'By faith,' says he, 'Abraham sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise,' because, 'he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder'—or rather *Architect*—'and maker'—or rather *Builder*—'is God.'

Now, of course, the writer gives a considerable extension of the meaning to the word 'faith'; and in his use one aspect of it is prominent, though by no means exclusively so—viz., the aspect which looks to the unseen and the future, rather than that which grasps the personal Christ. But this is no essential difference from the ordinary New Testament usage; it is only a variation in point of view, and in the prominence given to an element always present in faith. What he says here, then, is substantially this—that in these patriarchal lives we get a picturesque embodiment of the essential substance of all true Christian living, and that mainly in regard of two points, the great object which should fill mind and heart, and the consequent detachment from transitory things which should be cultivated. 'He looked for a city,' and *so* he was contented to dwell in a movable tent. That is an emblem containing the essence of what our lives ought to be, if we are truly to be Christian. Let us, then, deal with these two inseparable and indispensable characteristics of the life of faith.

I. Faith will behold the Unseen City, and the vision will steadfastly fill mind and heart.

As I have remarked, the conception of faith presented in the Epistle is slightly different from that found in other parts of the New Testament. It is but slightly different, for, whether we say that the object of our faith is the Christ, 'Whom having not seen we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' or whether we say that it is the whole realm and order of things beyond the grave and above the skies where He is and which He has made our native land, makes in reality very little difference. We come at last to the thought of personal reliance on Him by whose word and by whose resurrection and ascension only we apprehend, and by whose grace and power and love only we shall ever possess that unseen futurity. So we may fairly say that whilst, no doubt, it is true that the living Christ Himself—and no heaven apart from Him, nor any future apart from Him, nor any thing of His, apart from Him, though it be a cross, but the living Christ Himself is the true object of faith, yet that conception of its object includes the view of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and the 'city which has the foundations,' should, because it is all clustered round Him who is its King, be the object that fills our minds and hearts.

I am not going to discuss the details of what this writer supposes to have been the animating principle and aim of that ancient patriarch's life. It matters nothing at all for the power of his example whether we suppose that Abraham looked forward to the realisation of this unseen ideal city in this life or no, for the effect of it upon him would be exactly the same whichever of the two alternatives may have been the case. It matters nothing as to whether Abraham believed in the realisation in that land over which he wandered, of the perfect order of things, or whether he had caught some glimpse, which is very unlikely, of it as reserved for a future beyond the grave. In either case, he lived for and by an unseen and future condition of things. It is beautiful to notice how the writer here, in his picturesque and simple words, puts many blessed ideas as to that future. We may, perhaps, make these a little more clear, but I am afraid we shall make them much more weak, by taking them out of the metaphorical form.

'*The* City'—then there is only one. 'The *City*'—then the object of our hope, ought to be, and is, if we understand it aright, a perfect society, in which the 'sojourners and pilgrims,' like the patriarch, and his little band of children and attendants, who wandered lonely up and down the world, will all be gathered together at last; and, instead of the solitude of the march, and the undefended weakness of the frail encampment, there will be the conjoined gladness and security of an innumerable multitude. 'The City' is the perfection of society, and all of us who live in the world, alone after all communion, and separated from each other by the awful mystery of personal being, and by many another film beside, may hope to understand, as we never shall do here, what the meaning of the little word 'together' is when we get there. 'He looked for the city.'

'The city which hath the foundations'—then the object of faith is a stable thing, which knows no fluctuations, feels no changes, fears no assault, can never be subjected to violence, nor ever crumple into dust. 'The city which hath the foundations'—here and now we have to build, if we build at all, more or less like the foolish man in the Master's parable, upon sand. It is the condition of our earthly life. We have to accept, and to make the best of it. But, oh! those who have learned most the agony of change and the misery of uncertainty are those who have been best disciplined to grasp at and lay up in their hearts the large consolation and encouragement hived in that designation, 'the city which hath *the* foundations.'

The city, 'whose *Architect*'—for the word rendered 'Builder' should be so translated—'is God.' It is the accomplishment of His plan, which, in modern language, is called the realisation of His ideal. I like the old-fashioned Biblical language better—'the city whose Architect is God.' He planned, and, of course, there follows upon that 'whose Maker or actual Builder is'—the same as the Planner. Architects put their drawings into the hands of rude workmen, and no completed work of man's hands corresponds to the fair vision that dawned on its designer when it took definite shape in His mind.

That is another of the laws of our earthly life which we have to make the best of—that we design grand buildings when we begin, and, when we have finished our lives, and look back upon what we have built, it is a mean and incomplete structure at the best. But God's working drawings get built; His plans are all wrought out in an adequate material; and everything that was in the divine mind once exists in outward fact in that perfect future.

So, inasmuch as the city is a state of perfect society, of stability, is planned by God, and brought about by Him at last, it is to be possessed by us on condition of fellowship with Him. Does it not seem to you to be infinitely unimportant whether this old patriarch thought that what he was looking for was to be builded upon the hills and plains of Canaan or not? That he had the vision is the thing. Where it was to be accomplished was of small moment. We do not know where the vision is to be accomplished any more than Abraham did. We do not know whether here, on this old earth, renovated by some cosmic change, or whether in some region in space, though beyond the stars, perfected spirits shall dwell, and it does not matter. That we should have the vision is the main thing. The where, the when, the how of its fulfilment are of no manner of practical importance, and people who busy themselves about such questions, and think that therefore they are cultivating the spirit that my text suggests, make a woful mistake.

But let me press on you, dear brethren, this one simple thought, that the average type of Christian life and experience to-day is wofully lacking in that clear vision of the future. Partly it comes, I suppose, from certain peculiarities in the trend of thought and way of looking at things that are fashionable in this generation. We hear so much about Christianity as a social system, and about what it is going to do in this world, which perhaps it was necessary should be stated very emphatically, in order to counterpoise the too great silence upon such subjects in past times, that preaching about the future life strikes a hearer as unfamiliar, and probably some of my audience have been feeling as if I were carrying them into misty regions far away from, and little related to, the realities of life. But, dear brethren, from my heart I believe that one very operative cause of the undeniable feebleness of Christian life, which is so largely manifested round us—and it is for each of us to say whether we participate in it—is due to this, that, somehow or other, there has come in the mind of great masses of Christian people a fading away of that blessed vision of the city, for which we ought to live. You scarcely hear sermons nowadays about the blessedness of a future life. What you hear about it is, how well for this life it is to be a Christian man.

No doubt godliness 'hath promise of the life that now is,' and that side of the gospel cannot be too emphatically set forth. But it may be disproportionately presented, as I venture to think that, on the whole, it is being presented now. Therefore there is the more need for consciously endeavouring to cultivate the habit of looking beyond the mists of the present to the gleaming battlements and spires of the city. Let us polish the glasses of our telescopes, and use them not only for distances on earth's low levels, but to bring the stars nearer. So shall we realise more of the present good and power of faith, when it is allowed its widest and noblest range.

II. Faith consequently leads to willing detachment from the present order of offerings.

'He dwelt in tabernacles,' that is, he lived a nomad life in his tents. He and his son and grandson—three generations of long livers—proved the depth, solidity, and practical power of their faith in the promise of the city by the remarkable persistence of their refusal to be absorbed in the settled population of the land. Recent discoveries have shown us, and discoveries still to be made, I have no doubt, will show still more, what a highly organised and developed civilisation prevailed in Canaan when these wanderers from the East came into it, with their black camels'-hair tents. They were almost as much out of place, and as noticeably unique, by such a life in Canaan then, as gypsies are in England, and the reason why they would not go into Hebron, or any other of the populous cities which were closely studded in the land, was that 'they looked for *the* City.' It was better for them to dwell in tents than in houses.

The clear vision of that great future impresses on us the transiency of the present. We shall know that what we live in is but as a tent that is soon to be struck, even while some of our fellow-lodgers may fancy it to be a house that will last for ever.

The illusion of the permanence of this fleeting show creeps over us all, in spite of our better knowledge, and has to be fought against. The world, though it seems to be at rest, is going faster than any of the objects in it which are known to be in motion. We are deceived by the universality of the movement of which all things partake, and to us it seems rest. If there comes friction, and now and then a collision, we find out how fast we are going. And then there come misery, and melancholy, and lamentations about the brevity of life, and the awfulness of change, and all these other commonplaces that are the stock-in-trade of poetasters, but which cut with such surprise and agony into our own hearts when we experience them.

But, brethren, to be convinced of the transiency of life, by reason of the clearness of the vision of the permanence of the heavens, is blessedness and not misery, and is the only way by which a man can bear to say to himself, 'My days are as a hand-breadth,' and not fling down his tools and fall into sadness, from feeling that life is as futile as frail. To recognise that nothing continues in one stay, and to see nothing else that is permanent, is the greatest misery that is laid upon man. But to feel, 'Thou art from everlasting to everlasting, and Thy kingdom endureth through all generations and I belong to it,' makes us regard with equanimity, and sometimes with solemn satisfaction, the passing away of all the transient, 'that the things which cannot be shaken may remain.' 'He looked for a city'; so, 'he dwelt in tents.'

There is another side to that thought. The clear vision of that permanent future will detach us from the perishable present.

Now many difficult questions arise as to how far Christians should hold aloof from the order of things in which they dwell: and to a very large extent the application of the principle in detail must be left to each man for himself, in the presence of God. But this I am quite sure of, that in this generation the average Christian has a great deal more need to be warned against too great intermingling with than against too great separation from the present world. Abraham sets us an example beautifully comprehensive. He held cordial relations with the people amongst whom he dwelt. He was honoured by them as a prince; he was recognised by them as a servant of God. They knew his bravery. He did not scruple to draw the sword, and to fight in defence, not only of his kinsmen but of his heathen neighbours in Sodom. And yet nothing would induce him to come down from his tent, beneath the terebinth tree of Mamre, in the uplands. Everybody knew that his name was Abraham the Hebrew—the man from the other side. He carried out that name in his life.

Now, I am not going to lay down hard and fast rules —conventional regulations are the ruin of principles. But let us ask ourselves, 'Would anybody call me "the man from the other side," the man who belongs to another set of things altogether than this?' We have to work in the world; to trade in the world; to try to influence the world; to draw many of our enjoyments from it, in common with those who have no other enjoyments than those drawn from it. Of course, there is a great tract of ground common to the men of faith and the men of sense, and I am not urging false aloofness from any occupation, interest, duty, or enjoyment. But what I say is that, if we have the vision of the city clear before us, there will be no need to tell us not to make our home in Hebron or in Sodom.

Lot went down there when he had his choice—and he got what he wanted, pasturage for his cattle. But he also got what he did not want, destruction, and he lost what he did not care to keep, his share in the city. Abraham stayed on the heights, and up there he kept God, and a good conscience. Probably he did not make so much money as Lot did. Very likely Lot's flocks and herds were larger than his uncle's. But the one man from his height, through the clear air, could see far away the sparkling of the turrets of the city; and the other, down in the hot, steaming plains of Sodom, could see nothing but Sodom and the mountains behind it. Better to live on the heights with Abraham and God than down below with Lot, and wealth, and subterranean brimstone, and naphtha fires ready to burst forth. 'He looked for the city,' 'he dwelt in tents.'

THE ATTACHMENTS AND DETACHMENTS OF FAITH

'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.'—HEB. xi. 13 (R.V.).

THE great roll-call of heroes of faith in this grand chapter goes upon the supposition that the living spirit of religion was the same in Old and in New Testament times. In both it was faith which knit men to God. It has often been alleged that that great word *faith* has a different signification in this Epistle from that which it has in the other New Testament writings. The allegation is largely true; in so far as the things believed are concerned they are extremely different; but it is not true in so far as the person trusted, or in so far as the act of trusting are concerned. These are identical. It was no mere temporal and earthly promise on which the faith of these patriarchs was builded. They looked indeed for the land, but in looking for the land, they looked 'for the city which hath foundations'; and their future hopes had the same dim haze of ignorance, and the same questions unresolved about perspective and relative distances which our future hopes have; and their faith, whatever were its contents, was fundamentally the same out of a soul casting itself upon God, which is the essence of our faith in the Divine Son in whom God is made manifest. So with surface difference there is a deep-lying absolute oneness in the faith of the Old Testament and ours, in essential nature, in the Object which they grasp, and in their practical effects upon life.

Therefore, these words of my text, describing what faith did for the world's grey forefathers, have a more immediate bearing upon us than at first sight may appear, and may suggest for us some thoughts about the proper, practical issues of Christian faith in our daily lives.

I. I take two or three of the points which come most plainly out from the words before us, and ask you to notice, in the first place, how faith fills eye and heart with the future.

You will have observed that I have read my text somewhat differently from the form which it assumes in our Authorised Version. Observe that the words 'And were persuaded of them,' in our Old Version are a gloss,—no part of the original text. Observe, further, that the adverb 'afar off' is intended to apply to both the clauses: 'Having seen them,' and 'embraced them.' And that, consequently, 'embraced' must necessarily be an inadequate representation of the writer's idea; for you cannot *embrace* a thing that is 'afar off'; and to 'embrace the promises' was the very thing that these men did *not* do. The meaning of the word is here not *embraced*, but *saluted* or *greeted*; and the figure that lies in it is a very beautiful one. As some traveller topping the water-shed may see far off the white porch of his home, and wave a greeting to it, though it be distant, while his heart goes out over all the intervening, weary leagues; or as some homeward-bound crew catch, away yonder on the horizon, the tremulous low line that is home, and welcome it with a shout of joy, though many a billow dash and break between them and it, these men looked across the weary waste, and saw far away; and as they saw their hearts went out towards the things that were promised, because they 'judged Him faithful that had promised.' And that is the attitude and the act which all true faith in God ought to operate in us.

So, then, here are two things to think about for a moment. One, Faith's vision; the other, Faith's greeting.

People say, 'Seeing is believing.' I should be disposed to turn the aphorism right round, and to say, 'Believing is seeing.' For there is a clearer insight, and a more immediate, direct contact with the thing beheld, and a deeper certitude in the vision of faith than in the poor, purblind sight of sense, all full of illusions, and which has no real possession in it of the things which it beholds. The sight that faith gives is solid, substantial, clear, certain. If I might so say, the true exercise of faith is to stereoscope the dim ghost like realities of the future, and to make them stand out solid in relief there before us. And he who, clasp-ing the hand, and if I might so say, looking through the eyes, of God, sees the future, in humble acceptance of His great words of promise, in some measure as God sees it—has a source of knowledge, clear, immediate, certain, which sense with its lies and imperfections, is altogether inadequate even to symbolise. The vision of Faith is far deeper, far more real, far more correspondent to the realities, and far more satisfying to the eye that gazes, than is any of the sight of sense. Do not you be deceived or seduced by talk that assumes to be profound and philosophical, into believing that when you venture your all upon God's word, and doing so say, 'I know, and behold mine inheritance,' you are saying more than calm reason and common-sense teaches us. We have the thing, and we see it, if we believe Him that in His word shows it to us.

Well, then, still further, there is suggested that this vision of faith, with all its blessed clearness and certitude and sufficiency, is not a direct perception of the things promised, but only a sight of them in the promise. And does that make it less blessed? Does the astronomer, who sits in his chamber, and when he would most carefully observe the heavens, looks downwards on to the mirror of the reflecting telescope that he uses, feel that he sees the starry lights less clearly and less really than when he gazes up into the abyss itself and sees *them* there? Is not the reflection a better and a more accurate source of knowledge for him than even the direct observation of the sky would be? And so, if we look down into the promise, we shall see, gleaming and glittering there, the starry points which are the true images adapted to our present sense and power of reception of the great invisible lights above. God be thanked that faith looks to the promises and not to the realities, else it were no more faith, and would lose some of its blessedness.

And then, still further, let me remind you that this vision of faith varies in the measure of our faith. It is not always the same. Refraction brings up sometimes, above the surface of the sea, a spectral likeness of the opposite shore, and men stand now and then upon our southern coasts, and for an hour or two, in some conditions of the atmosphere, they see the low sandhills of the French or the Belgian coast, as if they were at arm's length. So faith, refracting the rays of light that strike from the Throne of God, brings up the image, and when it is strong the image is clear, and when it flags the image 'fades away into the light of common day'; and where there glowed the fair outlines of the far-off land, there is nothing but a weary wash of waters and a solitary stretch of sea.

My brother! do you see to it that this vision of faith is cultivated by you. It is hard to do. The pressure of the present is terribly strong; the chains of sense that hold us are very adamantine and thick; but still it is possible for us to cultivate the faculty of beholding, and to train the eye to look into that telescope that pries into distant worlds, and brings eternal glories near. No pair of eyes can look the one at a thing near, and the other at a thing afar off; at least if they do the man squints. And no soul can look so as to behold the unseen glories if its eye be turned to all these vanities here. Do you choose whether you shall, like John Bunyan's man with the muckrake, have your eyes fixed upon the straws and filth at your feet, or whether you will look upwards and see the crown that is glittering there just above your head, and ready to drop upon it. 'These all in faith saw the promises.'

Yes! And when they saw them they greeted them. Their hands and their hearts went out, and a glad shout came to their lips as they beheld the fair vision of all the wonder that should be. And so faith has in it, in proportion to its depth and reality, this going out of the soul towards the things discerned. They draw us when we see them.

One of our seventeenth-century prose writers says:—'Were the happiness of the next world as closely apprehended as felicities of this, it were a martyrdom to live.' It is true. If we see, we cannot choose but love. Our vision will break into desire, and to behold is to yearn after. Oh, Christian men and women! do we know anything of that going out of the soul, in a calm transport of deliberate preference to the things that are unseen and eternal. It is a sharp test of the reality of our Christian profession; do not shrink from applying it to yourselves.

II. And now in the next place, we see here how faith produces a sense of detachment from the present.

'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' The writer is, no doubt, referring to the words of Abraham when he stood up before the Hittites, and asked for a bit of ground to lay his Sarah in—'I am a stranger and a sojourner with you'; and also to Jacob's words to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years.' These utterances revealed the spirit in which they looked upon the settled order in the midst of which they dwelt. They felt that they were not of it, but belonged to another.

Now there are two different kinds of consciousness that we are strangers and sojourners here. There is one that merely comes from the consideration of the natural transiency of all earthly things, and the shortness of human life. There is another that comes from the consciousness that we belong to another kingdom and another order. A 'stranger' is a man who, in a given constitution of things, in some country with a settled government, owes allegiance to another king, and belongs to another polity. A 'pilgrim' or a 'sojourner' is a man who is only in the place where he now is for a little while. So the one of the two words expresses the idea of belonging to another state of things, and the other expresses the idea of transiency in the present condition.

But the true Christian consciousness of being 'a stranger and a sojourner' comes, not from any thought that life is fleeting and ebbing away, but from the better and more blessed operation of the faith which reveals the things promised, and knits me so closely to them that I cannot but feel separated from the things that are round about me. Men who live in mountainous countries, be it Switzerland, or the Highlands, or anywhere else, when they come down into the plains, pine and fade away sometimes, with the intensity of the 'Heimweh,' the homesickness which seizes them. And we, if we are Christians, and belong to the other order of things, shall feel that this is not our native soil, nor here the home in which we would dwell. Abraham could not go to live in Sodom, though Lot went; and he and his son and grandson kept themselves outside of the organisation of the society in the midst of which they dwelt, because they were so sure that they belonged to another. Or, as the context puts it, they 'dwelt in *tents* because they looked for the *City*.' It is only sad, disheartening, cutting the nerve of much activity, destroying the intensity of much joy, drawing over life the pall of a deep sadness for a man to say, 'Seventy years are a hand-breadth. I am a stranger and a sojourner.' But it is an ally of all noble, intense, happy living that a man should say, 'My home is with God. I am a stranger and a sojourner here.' The one conviction is perfectly consistent with even desperate absorption in present things. 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die,' is quite as legitimate a conclusion from the consciousness of human frailty, as, 'Let us live for heaven, for to-morrow we die.' It all depends upon what is the source and occasion of this consciousness, whether it shall make us bitter, and shall make us cling to the perishable thing all the more because it is going so soon, or whether it shall lift us up above all these transient treasures or sorrows and fill our hearts with the glad conviction, 'I am a citizen of no mean city, and therefore here I am but a stranger.'

My brother! does your faith lessen the bonds that bind you to earth? Does it detach you from the things that are seen and temporal, or is your life ordered upon the same maxims and devoted to the pursuit of the same objects, and gladdened by the same transitory and partial successes, and embittered by the same fleeting and light afflictions which rule and sway the lives that are rooted only in earth as the tempest sways the grass on the sandhills? If so, what business have we to call ourselves Christians? If so, how can we say that we live by faith when we are so blind, and so incapable of seeing afar off, that the smallest trifle beside us blots out from our vision.

as a fourpenny piece held up against your eyeball might do the sun itself in the heavens there. True faith detaches a man from this present. If your faith does not do that, look into it and see where the falsity of it is.

III. And, lastly, my text brings out the thought of how this same faith triumphs in the article of death. 'These all died in faith.'

That is a very grand thought as applied to those old patriarchs, that just because all their lives long God had done nothing for them of what He had promised, therefore they died believing that He was going to do it. All their disappointments fed their faith. Because the words on which they had been leaning all their lives had not come to a fulfilment, therefore they must be true. That is a strange paradox, and yet it is the one which filled these men's hearts with peace, and which made the dying Jacob break in upon his prophetic swan-song, at the close, with the verse which stands in no relation to what goes before it, or what comes after it. 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' 'These all died in faith' just because they had *not* 'received the promises.'

So, dear brethren, for us the end of life may have a faith nurtured by disappointments, made more sure of everything because it has nothing; certain that He calls into existence another world to redress the balance of the old, because here there has been so much of bitterness and weariness and woe. And our end like theirs may be an end beatified by a clear vision of the things that 'no man hath seen, nor can see'; and into the darkness there may come for us, as there came of old to another, an open heaven and a beam of God's glory smiting us on the face and changing it into the face of an angel. And so there may come for us all in that article and act of death, a tranquil and cheerful abandonment of the life which has been futile and frail, except when thought of as the vestibule of heaven. Some men cling to the vanishing skirts of this earthly life, and say, 'I will not let thee go.' And others are able to say, 'Lord! I have waited for Thy salvation.' 'Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.'

'These all died in faith'; and the sorrows and disappointments of the past made the very background on which the bow of promise spanned the sky, beneath which they passed into the Promised Land. 'These all died in faith'; with a vision gleaming upon the inward sense which made the solitude of death bliss, and with a calm willingness 'to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better.'

Choose whether you will live by sense and die in sorrow, or whether you will live by the faith of the Son of God, and die to enter 'the City which hath foundations,' which He has built for them that love Him, and which even now, 'in seasons of calm weather,' we can see shining on the hill top far away.

SEEKING THE FATHERLAND

'They that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country.
HEB. xi. 14.

WHAT things? Evidently those which the writer has just been saying that the patriarchs of old 'said,' as stated in the previous words—'They confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth.' The writer has in his mind, no doubt, some of the beautiful incidents of the Book of Genesis; especially, I suppose, that very touching one where Abraham is standing up by the side of his dead, in the presence of the sons of Heth, and begs from them for the first time a little piece of land that he could call his own. He tells them that he is a stranger and a sojourner amongst them, and wants 'the field and the cave that is therein' in which to bury his dead. Or he may be thinking of the no less touching incident, when Jacob, in his extreme old age, tells the King of Egypt that the days of the years of his pilgrimage have been few and evil, not having attained to the years of his father.

The writer points to these declarations, and reads into them what he was entitled to read into them, something more than a mere acceptance of the external facts of the speakers' condition, as wanderers in the midst of a civilisation to which they did not belong. He sees gleaming through the primary force of the words the further hope which the patriarchs cherished, though it was, as it were, latent in the nearer hope of an earthly inheritance—viz., that of the city which hath foundations, and the country which they could call their own.

Although the writer is not adducing these patriarchs as being patterns for us, but is only establishing his great thesis that they lived by faith in a future blessing, as we ought to do, still we may take the words of my text, with a permissible amount of violence, as appropriate to all of us who call ourselves Christians. 'They who say *such* things do hereby declare plainly,' and by their lives should declare more plainly still, 'that they are seeking a country.'

I. Note, then, first of all, the remarkable representation here given of that future for which Christians look, as being their native land.

The word of our text is very inadequately rendered in our Authorised Version as merely 'a country.' Fully and etymologically rendered, it would be 'the fatherland.' Whether we choose to adopt that somewhat un-English expression or no, at all events, the idea conveyed is that these men, having come out from Mesopotamia, and being wanderers, in their goat's-hair tents, in the midst of the fenced cities of Canaan, were thereby seeking for a land which was their native land, their home, the place to which they felt that they belonged far more truly than to the land from which they came out, or to the land in which they were for the moment wandering. That is the idea that I would enforce as needful for all true and noble Christian living, the recognition that our true home, the country and the order with which we are connected by all our deepest and most real affinities, the land where, and where only, we shall feel at rest, and surrounded by familiar things and loved persons, is that land which lies beyond the flood.

We do not belong, and should feel that we do not belong, to the place and order where we happen to stand to-day. This present and the order of things here should be for us either like that Aram Naharaim, 'the Syria between the two rivers,' the dust of which Abraham had shaken from off his feet; or it should be like that rotten though splendid civilisation into the midst of which He came, and of which He sternly refused to enrol Himself as a citizen. Our home is where Jesus Christ is, and there is something profoundly wrong in us unless we feel that that, and not this, is our native soil, and that there, and not here, is the place to which we belong.

Our colonists on the other side of the world, though they have never seen England, talk about 'going home.' And so we, inhabitants of this outlying colony of the great city, ought to look across the flood, and sometimes catch a sight of those bright realms beyond, and always feel that they are really our native land. 'They that say such things declare plainly' that they are not citizens here, but belong yonder.

II. Then, mark again, the other parallel which may be drawn between these men's attitude and ours, in that their whole career was a seeking the true Fatherland.

Again, our translation is inadequate because it does not give the energetic force of the word that is rendered 'seek.' It was not a seeking, on the part of the patriarchs, in the sense of looking for an unseen thing, or searching about to find an undiscovered one. That was all done for them by God. They had not to seek in that unsatisfactory and disturbing sense, but they *had* to seek, in the sense of projecting their desires onwards to the blessing that God held out in His hand for them, and letting their faith grasp the promise and their thoughts expatiate in the future, which was as sure to them as the present, because God had made it. The word for *seeking* in the original is very emphatic. It implies the going out of longings and yearnings and thoughts to something which *is* there, to be grasped and laid hold of. Thank God we have not to seek our native soil as wanderers who may perchance fail in our quest, and die at last homeless. It is brought to us, and certified to us by the divine veracity, sealed to us by the divine faithfulness, reserved for us by the divine power, made possible for us by the divine forgiving mercy. But still we have to seek, letting our hearts go out towards that good land. letting our thoughts play about it and become familiar with it, letting our desires tend towards it, and ever, in all the dusty ways of daily life, and amidst all the distractions of monotonous and recurring duties, keeping our heads above the mist and looking into the clear blue, where we may see the vision of the certain future.

The management and discipline of our thoughts is included in that seeking, and I am afraid that that is a part of Christian culture woefully neglected by the average Christian of this day. If we consider the comparative magnitude of the future and the present, and the certain issue of the present in the future, are our thoughts of it such as common-sense would make them? Is that 'land that is very far off' a frequent ordinary subject of contemplation by us, in the midst of the hurry and bustle of our daily life? Or have we let the glasses of the telescope of hope get all dimmed and dirty; and when we do polish them up, do we use them to look at the stars with, or at the earth and its beauties? Whither do my anticipations of the future tend? Is my hope shortsighted or longsighted? Is it only able to see the things on this side the river, or can it catch any of the glories beyond? Our fault is not in not living enough in the future, but in the selection of the future in which we live. 'We are saved by hope,' if we rightly direct the hope. We are ruined by hopes when they are cribbed, cabined, and confined to this miserable present. Brother! do you seek your home by the cultivation of the contemplation of it and the desire for it, and so almost emulate the divine prerogative and call things that are not as though they were?

Oh! how different our lives would be if we walked in the light of that great hope, and how different everything here would be if we regarded all here as auxiliary and subsidiary to that.

Above all, if it were true of us, as it ought to be in accordance with our profession of being Christians, that we seek a country, should we think about death as we do? Should we drape it in such ugly forms? Should we shrink from it as most of us, I fear, do as a dread and an enemy and a disaster? No doubt there is, and there always will be, a natural shrinking; but the man who can say that to die is to be with Christ, and who sets that thought ever before him, will be helped over the dark gulf; and the shrinking will be turned, if not into desire at least into calm scorn of the last enemy, the encounter with whom does not diminish his longing to be with his Lord.

These are heights of Christian feeling so far above most of us that we are tempted to think them unreal and fantastic; but they are the heights to which we should naturally rise, if once we realised the greatness, the blessedness, the certainty of that hidden hope above. Dear friends, if we look onwards to our own end, are we only or chiefly conscious of a cold thrill of recoil and repulsion? Let us ask ourselves if our feeling corresponds to our profession that Christ is our life, and that where He is is our heaven and our hope.

III. Lastly, notice the unmistakable witness of profession and life which we are to bear.

'They declare plainly.' They make it absolutely and unmistakably manifest, says the writer, that they seek a country. It did not need that Abraham should stand up before the sons of Heth and say, 'I am a pilgrim and a sojourner amongst you.' They all knew it. *There* was his tent outside the city walls, and a strange life that little tribe of people, he and his followers, lived, wandering up and down the land and refusing to settle themselves anywhere. They lived a life unlike that of the people among whom they dwelt. We know that in these early days there were fenced cities, outside the walls of which they dwelt, and there all the evidences of a highly developed and advanced civilisation existing in the land. These patriarchs lived like gypsies in the country, roaming everywhere but rooted nowhere; and the reason they so lived was that they 'looked for a city which hath foundations.'

'Yes! the man, before the eyes of whose faith there is ever shining that permanent state of blessed union with Jesus Christ and of sweet society with all the good, can afford to recognise the things that are seen as transient, as they must be. He will be in no danger of mistaking the fleeting shows for eternal realities. If we are looking for the city we shall dwell in tabernacles; and the more our faith grasps the permanent realities beyond, the more will our experience realise the transitoriness of the things here by our sides.

The very fact that men call themselves Christians is a declaration that they are seeking for a city. Do you act up to your declaration? Is your Christianity a matter of lip or of life? Have you pitched your tents outside the city to confirm your declaration that you do not belong to this community? And do you live as in it, but not of it?

Our outward lives ought to make most distinctly manifest that we are citizens of the heavens, and that will be made manifest by abstinence from a great deal. There are many things, right enough in themselves, which are not expedient, and therefore not right, for a

Christian man to do, if they fasten him down to this present. And you will have to cut yourselves loose from a good deal to which otherwise it would be permissible for you to be attached, if you intend to rise towards God; and whatever we do like other people, we shall have to do from a manifestly different temper or spirit. Two men may engage in precisely the same occupation. For instance, there may be two tellers at one side of a bank counter, or two depositors on the other, doing exactly the same things, and yet one of them may do them so as to 'declare plainly,' even in that act, 'that he is seeking a country,' and that he is not wholly swallowed up in the love and high estimate of worldly wealth. The motive from which, the end towards which, the help by which, the accompanying thoughts with which, we do our daily, secular work, may hallow it, and make it express our heavenly-mindedness, as completely as if we went apart on the mountain, and held communion in prayer and praise with God.

We do not want 'plain' declarations by so-called religious acts, still less by religious professions, half as much as we do plain declarations by an obviously Christian way of doing secular things, and living the daily life of men upon earth. Remember the illustration from the conduct of the very men of whom my text speaks. I said that they kept themselves aloof from the civilisation around them. That requires modification to be a full statement of the case. They threw themselves into it, when necessary, with all energy. Lot went down to Sodom because it offered good grazing land. He behaved just as many professing Christians handle the world, going down amongst the slime-pits and the scoundrels for the sake of making a little money out of them—whilst Abraham stopped on the more barren pastures of the hills, with freedom, security, and holiness. When Lot got what he deserved, and was involved in the disaster of the city that he had made his home, Abraham did not say, 'It is a very sad thing, but Lot must get himself out of the difficulty.' He buckled on his sword and armed his followers, turning himself into a soldier for the time being, and promptly gave chase to the robbers, following them all through the night, along the whole length of the Holy Land, and pounced upon them, routing them, as they lay in fancied security, and liberating their prisoner, who was the captive of his own lust and covetousness much more sadly than of the Eastern marauders.

And so, the detachment from the present, which is needful for Christian men, is to be combined with the most energetic discharge of the duties which we owe to ourselves and to those around us, and especially to be combined with the most diligent work for those who have fallen captive to the snares of the world which we, by His mercy, have been able to escape. And he will best manifest, and most plainly declare, that he seeks a country who seeks most earnestly to hallow all ordinary life, and to do the work, here and now, which God prescribes for him. There is an old story about a question being put to some good man who was fond of playing chess. 'What would you do if, when you were at the chess-board, you were told that Jesus Christ was coming?' 'Finish the game' was the wise answer. There is another story about a scene in the American House of Representatives in its early time. A great darkness came on during the sitting, and some timid souls began to think that the last day was at hand. The President said, 'Bring candles and let us go on with the debate.' If the Master is coming, we are best found doing our work. Yes! Best doing our work, if it is His work. And all our work may be His if it is done for His sake and in His strength.

Christian men and women! see to it that there be no ambiguity about your position, no mistaking your nationality, and that in your life, without ostentation, without offensively forcing your religion upon peoples' notice, you declare plainly that you, at any rate, seek your native home.

THE FUTURE WHICH VINDICATES GOD

'Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He hath prepared for them a city.'—HEB. xi. 16.

THESE are bold words. They tell us that unless God has provided a future condition of social blessedness for those whom He calls His, their life's experience on earth is a blot on His character and administration. He needs heaven for His vindication. The preparation of the City is the reason why He is not 'ashamed to be called their God.' If there were not such a preparation, He had need to be ashamed. Then my text, further, by its first word 'wherefore,' carries our thoughts back to what has been said beforehand; and that is, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly.' Therefore God 'is not ashamed of them,' as the Revised Version has it, with a fuller rendering, 'to be called their God.' That is to say, the attitude of the men who look ever forward, through the temporal, to the things unseen and eternal, is worthy of their relation with Him, and it alone is worthy. And if people professing to be His, and professing that He is theirs, do not so live, they would be a disgrace to God, and He would be ashamed to own them for His.

So there are two lines of thought suggested by our text; two sets of obligations which are deduced by the writer of this Epistle from that solemn name—'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' The one set of obligations refers to Him; the other to us. There are, then, three things here for our consideration—the name; what it pledges God to do; and what it binds men to seek. Let me ask you to look at these three things with me.

I. First of all, then, regard the significance of the name round which the whole argument of our verse turns.

The writer lays hold of that wonderful designation, by which the God of the whole earth knit Himself, in special relationship of unity and mutual possession, to these three poor men—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he would have us ponder that name, as meaning a great deal more than the fact that these three were His worshippers, and that He was their God, in the sense in which Moloch was the God of the Phœnicians; Jupiter, the god of the Romans; or Zeus of the Greeks. There is a far deeper and sacreder relation involved than that. 'The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob' means not only that His name was in some measure known as a designation, and in some measure honoured by external worship, by the patriarchs, but it involved much in regard to Him, and much in regard to them. It is the name which He took for Himself, not which men gave to Him, and, therefore, it expresses what He had made Himself to these men. That is to say, the name implies a direct act of self-revelation on the part of God. It implies condescending approach and nearness of communion. It implies possession, mutual and reciprocal, as all possession of spirit by spirit must be. It implies still more wonderfully and profoundly that, just as in regard to the relations between ourselves, so, in regard to the loftiest of all relations, God owns men, and men possess God, because, on both sides of the relationship, there is the same love. Other forms of connection between men and God differ from this deepest of all in that the attitude on the one side corresponds to, but is different from, the attitude on the other. If we think of God as the object of trust, on His side there is faithfulness, on our side there is faith. If we think of Him as the object of adoration, on His side there is loftiness, on our side there is lowliness. If we think of Him as the Supreme Governor, His commandment is answered by our obedience. But if we think of Him as ours, and of ourselves as His, the bond is identical on either part. And though there be all the difference that there is between a drop of dew and the boundless ocean, between the little love that refreshes and bedews my heart, and the great abyss of the same that lies, not stagnant though calm, in His, yet my love is like God's, and God's love is like mine. And that is the deepest meaning of the name, 'the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob':—mutual possession based upon common and identical love.

And then, of course, in so far as we are concerned, the name carries with it the most blessed depths of the devout life, in all its sacredness of intimacy, in all its sweetness of communion, in all its perfectness of dependence, in all its victory over self, in all its triumphant appropriation, as its very own, of the common and universal good. It is much to be able to say 'Our God, our help in ages past.' It is more to be able to say 'My Lord and my God.' And that appropriation deprives no other of his possession of God. I do not rob you of one beam of the sunshine when it irradiates my vision. We take in of the common land that which belongs to us, and no other man is the poorer or has the less for his. My God is thy God; and when we each realise our individual and personal relation to Him, as expressed by these two little words, then we are able to say, in close union, 'Our God, the God and Father of us all.' So much, then, for the name.

II. Now a word or two, in the second place, as to what that name pledges God to do.

He is 'not ashamed' of it, 'for He hath prepared for them a city.' Now I do not need to enter at all upon the question as to whether the three patriarchs to whom my text has original reference had any notion of a future life. It matters nothing where or how they thought that that coming blessing towards which they were ever looking was to be realised. The point of the text is that, in any case, they were servants of a future promised to them by God, as they believed, and that that future shaped their whole life.

Think of what their life was. How all their days, from the moment when Abraham left his home, to the moment when the dying Jacob said, with a passion of unfilled expectancy, which yet had in it no hesitancy or doubt or rebuke, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,' that future shaped their whole career! And then, if the end of all was that they lay down in the dust and died, having been lured on from step to step by dazzling illusions dangled before them, which were nothing but dreams, what about the God who did it? and what about their relation to Him! Would there be anything in such a God deserving to be worshipped? Might He not be ashamed of 'being called their God' if that was all that they got thereby? God needs the City for His own vindication.

Now that seems to be a daring way of putting it, but it is only another form of expressing a very plain thought, that the facts of the religious life here on earth are such as necessarily do involve a future of blessedness, and a heaven.

I need not, I suppose, dwell for more than just in a sentence upon the first plain way in which this truth may be illustrated—namely, that nothing but a future life of blessedness, such as we usually connote by the simple name 'heaven,' saves God's veracity and the truthfulness of His promises. If we believe that the awful silence of the universe has ever been broken by a divine voice; if we believe that God has said anything to men—apart, I mean, from the revelation of Himself made by our nature and in our daily experience—we must believe that He has promised a life to come. And unless such a life do await those who, humbly and with many faults and imperfections, have yet clung to Him as theirs, and yielded themselves to Him as His possession, then

> 'The pillared firmament is rottenness,
> And earth's base built on stubble.'

Let God be true and every man a lie. Unless there is a heaven, He has flashed before us an illusion like that which has tempted many a wanderer into the bog to perish. He has fooled us with a *mirage*, which at the distance looked like palm-trees and cool, flashing lakes, and when we reach it is only burning sand, strewn with bleached bones of the generations that have been cheated before us. 'God is not ashamed . . . for He hath prepared a city.'

But, then, there is another thought, closely connected with the preceding, and yet capable of being dealt with separately, and that is that there is a blot ineffaceable on the divine character unless the desires which He Himself has implanted have a reality corresponding to them. That is true, of course, in the most absolute sense, in regard to all the physical necessities and yearnings which the animal nature possesses. In all that region God never sends mouths but He sends meat to fill them; and need is the precursor and the prophecy of supply. So it is in regard to the whole creation; so it is in regard to that in us which we share in common with them. Care never irks the full-fed beast. No ungratified desires torture the frame of the short-lived creatures. 'Foxes have holes, and the birds of air have their roosting-places'; and all beings dwell in an environment absolutely corresponding to their capacities, and fitted to satisfy their necessities. But amongst them stalks the exile of creation, man; blessed, though he sometimes thinks he is cursed, with longings which the world has nothing to satisfy; and with ideals which are never capable of realisation amidst the imperfections and fleetingnesses of time. And is that to be all? If so, then God is a tyrant and not a god, and there is little to love in such a character, and He might be ashamed, if He is not, to have made men like that, so ill-fitted for their abode, and to have bestowed upon them the possibility of imagining that to which realisation shall be for ever denied.

And if that is true in regard of many of the desires of life, apart altogether from religion, it becomes still more manifestly and eminently true in regard of Christian experience and devout emotions. For if there is any one thing which an acceptance of Christianity in the heart and life is sure to do, it is to kindle and make dominant longings, yearnings rising sometimes to pain, which the world is utterly unable to satisfy. Is it ever to be so? Then, oh then, better for us that we should never have known that name; better for us that we had nourished a blind life within our brains; better for us that we had never been born. But 'He hath prepared for them a city,' where wishes shall be embodied, and the ideal shall be reality, and desires shall be fulfilled, and everything that has dwelt, silently and secretly, in the chambers of the imagination shall come forth into the sunlight. Morning dreams are proverbially true. 'We are not of the night, nor of the darkness: we are the children of the day,' and our dreams are one day to pass into the sober certainty of waking bliss.

Then there is another thought still, and that is that it would be a blot ineffaceable on the divine character if all the discipline of life were to have no field in the future on which its results could be manifested. These three poor men were schooled by many sorrows. What were they all for? For the City. And in like manner the facts of our earthly life and our Christian experiences are equally inexplicable and confounding unless beyond these dim and trifling things of time there lie the sunlit and solemn fields of eternity, in which whatsoever of force, valour, worthiness, manhood, we have made our own here shall expatiate for ever more.

I do not mean that life is so sad and weary that we need to call another world into existence to redress the balance of the old. I think that is only very partially true, for we are always apt in such considerations to minimise the pleasures on the whole, and to exaggerate the pains on the whole, of the earthly life. But I mean that the one true view of all that befalls us here on earth is discipline; and that discipline implies an end for which it is applied, and a realm in which its results are to be manifested. And if God carefully trains us, passes us through varieties of condition, in order to evolve in us a character conformed to His will; puts us to the long threescore years and ten of the apprenticeship, and then has no workshop in which to occupy us afterwards, we are reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment, and life is an inextricable tangle and puzzle.

You may go into certain prehistoric depôts, where you will find lying by thousands flint weapons which have been carefully chipped and shaped and polished, and then, apparently, left in a heap, and never anything done with them. Is the world a great cemetery of weapons prepared and then tossed aside like that? We need a heaven where the faithfulness of the servant shall be exchanged for the joy of the Lord, and he that was faithful in a few things shall be made ruler over many things.

III. And now a word about my last thought; and that is, what this name binds Christian people to seek.

My text in its former part says, 'They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God.' If Abraham, instead of stopping under the oak tree at Mamre, had gone down into Sodom with Lot, and taken up his quarters there; or if he had become a naturalised citizen of Hebron, and struck up alliances with the children of Heth, would the Sodomites or the Hebronites or the Hittites have thought any the better of him therefor? As long as he kept apart from them, he witnessed to the promise, and God looked upon him and blessed him. But if, professing to look for 'the city which hath the foundations,' he had not been content to dwell in tabernacles, God would have been ashamed of him to be called his God.

Translate that into plain English, and it is this. As long as Christian people live like pilgrims and strangers, they are worthy of being called God's, and God is glad to be called theirs. And as long as they do so, the world will know a religious man when it sees him, and, though it may not like him, it will at least respect him. But a secularised Church or individuals who say that they are Christians, and who have precisely the same estimates of good and evil as the world has, and live by the same maxims, and pursue the same aims, and never lift their eyes to look at the City beyond the river, these are a disgrace to God and to themselves, and to the religion which they say they profess.

I cannot but feel—and feel, I think, in growing degree—that one main clause of the woful feebleness of our average Christianity is that our hopes and visions of the City which hath the foundations have become dim, and that, to a very large extent, the thoughts of 'the rest that remaineth for the people of God' is dormant in the minds of the mass of professing Christian people.

Oh, dear friends! if we will yield to that sweet, strong appeal that is made to us in the name, and, feeling that God is ours and we are His, will turn our hearts and thoughts more than, alas! we have done, to that blessed hope, Jesus will not be ashamed to call us brethren, nor God be ashamed to be called our God. Let us beware that we are not ashamed to be called His, nor to 'declare plainly that we seek a country.'

THE FAITH OF MOSES

'By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25. Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; 26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. 27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible.'—HEB. xi. 24-27.

I HAVE ventured to take these verses as a text, not with the idea of expounding their details, or even of touching many of the large questions which they raise, but for the sake of catching their general drift. They are the writer's description of two significant instances in the life of the great Lawgiver of the power of faith. He deals with both in the same fashion. He first tells the act, then he analyses its spring in the state of feeling which produced it, and then he traces that state of feeling to certain external facts which were obvious to the faith of Moses. 'The Great Refusal,' by which he flung up his position at the court of Pharaoh, and chose to identify himself with his people, is the one His flight from Egypt to the solitudes of Horeb is the other. The two acts are traced to the states of feeling or opinion in Moses. The former came from a choice and an estimate. 'He chose to suffer with the people of God'; and he 'esteemed the reproach . . . greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.' The latter in like manner came from a state of feeling. He 'forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.' What underlay the choice, the estimate, the courage? 'He had respect,' or more literally and forcibly, 'he looked away to the recompense of the reward.' He saw 'Him who is invisible.' So, an act of vision which disclosed him a future recompense and a present God was the basis of all. And from that act of vision there came states of mind which made it easy and natural to choose a lot of suffering and humiliation, and to turn away from all the glories and treasures and wrath of Egypt.

That is to say, we have here two things—what this man saw, and what the vision did for his life, and I wish to consider these two. The same sight is possible for us; and, if we have it, the same conduct will certainly follow.

I. Note then, first, what this man saw.

Two things, says the writer. 'He looked away to the recompense of the reward,' and he saw God. Now I need not remind you, I suppose, that these two objects of real vision correspond to the two elements of faith which the writer describes in the first verse of our chapter, where he says that it is 'the substance of things hoped for'; to which corresponds 'the recompense of the reward,' and 'the evidence of things not seen,' to which answers 'Him who is invisible.'

Now, that conception of faith, as having mainly to do with the future and the unseen, is somewhat different superficially from the ordinary notion of faith, set forth in the New Testament, as being trust in Jesus Christ. But the difference is only superficial, and arises mainly from a variety in the prominence given to the elements which both conceptions have in common. For the faith which is trust in Jesus Christ *is* directed towards the unseen, and includes in itself the realisation of the future. And the faith which is vivid consciousness of the invisible world, and realisation of a coming retribution, finds them both most clearly and most surely in that Lord 'in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing we rejoice,' and anticipate the future 'end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

So we may take these two points that emerge from our text, and look at them as containing for our present purpose a sufficient description of what our faith ought to do for us.

There must be, first, then, a vivid and resolute realisation of future retribution. Now, note that this same expression, a somewhat peculiar one, 'the recompense of the reward,' is found again in this letter in directly the opposite reference from that which it has here. In the second chapter of the Epistle we read that 'every transgression and disobedience shall receive its just recompense of reward.' Both recompense by punishment and by blessedness are included in the word, so that its meaning is the exact requital of good or evil by a sovereign judge.

And that is the very purpose which faith has for one of its chief functions, to burn in the conviction on our slothful minds—that all that is round about us is at once cause and consequence; that life is a network of issues of past actions, and of progenitors of future ones; that nothing that a man does ever dies; that

> 'Through his soul the echoes roll,
> And grow for ever and for ever'

that 'whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.' Character is the result of actions. Condition is largely, if not altogether, dependent upon conduct and upon character. And, just as the sandstone cliffs were laid down grain by grain by an evaporated ocean, and stand eternal when the waters have all vanished, so whatever else you and I are making of, and in, our lives, we are making permanent cliffs of character which will remain when all the waves of time have foamed themselves away.

That process, which is going on moment by moment all through our lives, Christian faith follows beyond the grave. It works right up to the edge of the grave as everybody can see, and many a man's last harvest of the seed that he sowed to the flesh is his, when laid a corrupted corpse into his coffin. But does it stop there? The world may say, 'We know not.' Christian faith overleaps the gulf and sees the process going on more intensely and unhindered in the life yonder. We are like signalmen in their isolated boxes. They pull a lever, and the points a quarter of a mile away are shifted. The man does not *see* what he has done, but he has done it all the same. And when his time for travelling comes, he will find that he has determined the course on which he must run by the actions that were done here.

And so, brethren, this conviction, not merely as being a selfish looking for a peaceful and blessed heaven, as some people try to vulgarise the conception, but as being the thrilling consciousness that every deed has its issues, and is to be done, or refrained from, in view of these, this is what is meant by the word of my text: 'he looked away' to the recompense of reward.

Now remember that such a vision clear and definite before a man, substantial and solid and continuous enough to become a formative power in his life, and even to determine its main direction, is only realisable as the result of very special and continuous effort. The writer of the letter employs a singular and a strong word, which I have tried to *English* by the phrase 'looking off unto the recompense.' He turned away by a determined effort of resolution, averting his gaze from other things in order to fix it on the far off thing. One use of the tube of the telescope is to shut out cross lights, and concentrate the vision on the far off object, looked at undisturbed. Unless we can thus shut off on either side these dazzling and bewildering brilliances that dance and flicker round us, we shall never see clearly that solemn future and all its infinite possibilities of sorrow or of blessedness. The eye that is focused to look at the things on the earth cannot see the stars. When the look-out man at the bow wants to make sure whether that white flash on the horizon is a sun-smitten sail or a breaker, he knits his brows and shades his eyes with his hand, and concentrates his steady gaze till he *sees*. And you and I have to do that, or the most real things in the universe, away yonder in the extreme distance, will be problematical and questionable to us. Oh, brother! our Christian lives would be altogether different if we made the resolve and kept it, to fix our gaze on 'the recompense of the reward.'

Then the next thing that this man saw, says my text, was 'Him who is invisible.'

Now I do not suppose that there is any reference there to the miraculous manifestations of a divine presence which were given to the lawgiver, for these came long after the incidents which are being dealt with in my text. True! he saw God face to face amidst the solitudes and the sanctities of Sinai. But that is not at all what the writer is thinking about here. He is thinking about the vision which was given to Moses, in no other fashion than it may be given to us, if we will have it, the sight of God to the 'inward eye, which is the bliss of solitude,' and ministers strength to our lives, in solitude or in society. The conscious realisation of God's presence in our minds and hearts and wills, and the whole trembling and yet rejoicing inner man, aware that God is near, are what is meant by this vision of Him. The realisation of His presence continually, the sight of Him in nature, so that every bush burns with a visible deity, and every cloud is the pillar in which He moves for guidance, the realisation of His presence, in history, in society, operating all changes and working round us, and in us, and on us—this is the highest result of a true religious faith.

And it is worthy to be called *sight*. For not the vision of the eye is the source of the truest certitude, but the vision of the inward spirit. A man may be surer of God than he is of the material universe that he touches and handles and beholds. The vision that a trustful heart has of God is as real, as direct, and, I venture to say, more assured, than the knowledge which is brought to us through sense.

And such a vision ought to be, and will be if we are right, no disturbing or unwelcome thought, but a delight and a strength. A prisoner in a solitary cell sometimes goes mad because he knows that somewhere in its walls there is a peep-hole at which, at any moment, the eye of a gaoler may be on the watch. But the loving heart that yearns after God has nothing but joy in the otherwise awful thought, 'If I take the wings of the morning, Thou art there. If I fly to the uttermost parts of the west, there I meet Thee.' 'If I make my bed in the grave, Thou art there. Thou hast beset me behind and before.' Brethren, either our ghastliest doubt or our deepest joy is, 'Thou, God, seest me.' 'When I awake I am still with Thee.'

II. And now, secondly, notice what the vision did for this man.

I cannot do more than touch very lightly upon the various points that are involved here. But I would have you notice in general that the writer masses the enemies of a noble life, which Moses overcame by this sight, in three general classes — pleasures, treasures, dangers. The faith of Moses lifted him above ignoble pleasures, saved him from coveting fleeting possessions, armed him against mere corporeal perils. And these three—delights, rules, dangers, may be roughly said to be the triple-headed Cerberus that bars our way. Let us look how the vision will help to overcome them all.

This sight will take the brightness out of ignoble and fleeting pleasures. Moses had the ball at his foot, Jewish legends tell us that the very crown was intended to be placed on his head. However that may be, a life of luxurious ease, of command over men, accompanied by the half deification which in old days hedged a king, were his for the taking; and he turned from them all. He did not choose suffering: but he chose to be identified with the people of God, though he knew that thereby he was electing a life of sorrow and of pain. The world has seen no nobler act than that when he passed through the gates of Pharaoh's palace, the fragments of whose glorious architecture we still wonder at, and housed himself in the dark reed huts where the slaves dwelt.

Now that same spirit, both in regard to choice and to estimate, must be ours, and will be ours, if we have any depth and reality of vision of the recompense and of the invisible God. For if you once let the light of these two solemn thoughts in upon the delights of earth, how poor and paltry, how coarse and ignoble, they look! Did you ever see the scenes of a theatre by daylight? What daubs; what rents; what coarse work! Let the light of the 'recompense' and of God in upon earthly delights, and how they shrivel, and dwindle, and disappear! Ah, brethren! if we would only bring our earthly desires to the touchstone of these two great thoughts, we should find that many a thing that holds us would slacken its grasp, and the fair forms, with their tiny harps, and their sweet songs that tempt us on the flowery island, would be seen for what they are—ravenous monsters whose guests are in the depths of hell. 'He had respect to the recompense of the reward,' and spurned ignoble pleasures. If you see the things that are, you will not be tempted with the things that seem.

And then, further, such a vision will help us to appraise at their true value earthly possessions. I cannot enter upon the question of what the writer means precisely by that singular phrase, attributing to Moses 'the reproach of Christ.' Whether it implies the reproach borne for Christ, or like Christ, or by Christ, all which interpretations are possible, and have been suggested, need not concern us now. The point is that the twofold vision of which the writer is speaking, let in upon worldly possessions, reveals their emptiness and drossiness, as compared with the true riches.

There are old stories of men who in the night received from fairy hands gifts of gold in some cave, and when the daylight came upon them what had seemed to be gold and jewels was a bundle of withered leaves and red berries, already half corrupted and altogether worthless. There are many things that the world counts very precious which are like the fairy's gold. Nothing that can be taken from a man really belongs to him. The only real riches, correspondent with his necessities, are those which, once possessed, are inseparable from his being, the riches of an indwelling God, and of a nature conformed to His.

And that effect of the vision of the unseen and the future, as bringing down to their true value all the wealth of Egypt and of the world, is a lesson which no man needs more than do we whose lives, and habits of thinking, are passed and formed in a commercial community, in which success means a fortune, and failure means poverty; in which the poor are tempted to look upon the possession of wealth as the only thing to be coveted, and the rich are tempted to look upon it as the one thing to be rejoiced over. Let the light of the future, and of God, ever shine upon your estimates of the worth of the world's wealth.

Lastly, such a vision will arm a man against all perils. I take it that 'forsaking Egypt' in my text refers to Moses' flight to Horeb. Now, in the book of Exodus that flight is traced to his fear. In my text it is traced to his courage. So, then, there may dwell in one heart fearing and not fearing. There may be dread, as there was with Moses, sufficient to impel him to flight, though not sufficient to induce him to abandon the purpose which made flight necessary. He was afraid enough to shelter himself. He was not afraid enough, by reason of dangers and difficulties, to fling up his mission.

That is to say, the vision will not take away from a man natural tremors, nor will it blind him to real dangers and difficulties, but it will steady his resolve, and make him determined, though he may have to bow before the blast, to yield no jot of his convictions, nor fling away any of his confidence. He will flee to Horeb, if need be, but he will not cease to labour for the redemption of Israel. If we put our trust in God, and live in the continual realisation of future retribution, then, whilst we may prudently adapt our course so as to find a smooth bit of road to walk on, and to avoid dangers which may threaten, we shall never let these either shake our confidence in God, or alter our conviction of what He requires from us.

So I gather up all that I have been trying to say in the one word—the true way to make life noble is the old way, the way of faith. The sight of God, the vision of judgment will make earth's pleasures paltry, earth's treasures dross, earth's dangers contemptible. The way to secure that ennobling and strengthening vision to attend us everywhere, is to keep near to Jesus Christ, and to fix our hearts on Him. In communion with Him pleasures that perish will woo in vain, and possessions from which we must part will lose their worth, and perils that touch the body will cease to terrify; and through faith 'we shall be more than conquerors in Him that loved us.'

THE CLOUD OF WITNESSES AND THEIR LEADER

'Compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, . . . looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of faith.'—HEB. xii. 1, 2.

WHAT an awful sight the rows above rows of spectators must have been to the wrestler who looked up at them from the arena, and saw a mist of white faces and pitiless eyes all directed on himself! How many a poor gladiator turned in his despair from them to the place where purple curtains and flashing axes proclaimed the presence of the emperor, on whose word hung his life, whose will could crown him with a rich reward!

That is the picture which this text brings before our eyes, as the likeness of the Christian life. We are in the arena; the race has to be run, the battle to be fought. All round and high above us, a mist, as it were, of fixed gazers beholds us, and on the throne is the Lord of life, the judge of the strife, whose smile is better than all crowns, whose downward-pointing finger seals our fate. We are compassed with a cloud of witnesses, and we may see Jesus the author and finisher of faith. Both of these facts are alleged here as encouragements to persevering, brave struggle in the Christian life. Hence we have here mainly two subjects for consideration, namely the relation between the saints who are gone and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it; and the contrasted relation between Jesus and ourselves, and the encouragement derived from it.

I. The metaphor of the '*cloud* of witnesses' is perhaps intended to express multitude, and also elevation. It may have been naturally suggested by the thought of the saints of the Old Testament (of whom the previous chapter has been so nobly speaking) as exalted to heaven, and hovering far above and far away like the pure whitenesses that tower there. Raphael's great Sistine Madonna has for background just such a light mist of angel faces and adoring eyes all turned to the gentle majesty of the Virgin. There may also be blending in the writer's mind such a reference to the amphitheatre as we have already noticed, which certainly exists in the later portion of the context. But we must remember that tempting as it is to a hasty reader to deduce from the words the idea that the saints whose 'warfare is accomplished' look down on our struggles here, there is, at all events, no support to that idea in the word 'witnesses.' It is not used, as often in our speech, as equivalent to spectators,' but means here exactly what it does in the previous chapter, namely, attestors or testifiers. They are not witnesses of us, but to us, as we shall see presently. It may, indeed, be that the thought of the heavenly spectators of our Christian course is implied in the whole strain of the passage, and of the imagery borrowed from the arena, which would certainly be incomplete if there were nothing to answer to the spectators, who, whether at Corinth or Rome, made so important a part in the scene.

We shall be going too far, I think, if we dogmatically assert, on the strength of a figure, that this context teaches a positive communion between earth and heaven of such a sort as that they who have 'overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony,' know about the struggles of us down here in the arena. Still, one feels that such an idea is almost needed to give full force either to the figure or exhortation. It does seem somewhat lame to say, You are like racers, surrounded with a crowd of witnesses, therefore run, only do not suppose that they really see you. If this be so, the glowing imagery certainly seems to receive a violent chill, and the flow of the exhortation to be much choked. Still we can go no further than a modest 'perhaps.'

But even as a 'may be,' the thought of such a knowledge stimulates. As all the thousand eyes of assembled Greece looked on at the runners, and all the dialects of its states swelled the tumult of acclaim which surged round the victor, so here the general assembly and Church of the firstborn, the festal gathering on Mount Zion, into relations with which this very chapter says we have come, may be conceived of as sitting, solemn and still, on the thrones around the central throne, and bending not unloving looks of earnest pity on the arena below where they too once toiled and suffered.

It may be that, before their eyes, who have been made wise by death, and who, standing within the 'sanctuary of God, understand the end' of life and life's sorrows, are manifest our struggles, as with weary feet and drooping limbs we blunder on in the race. Surely there is love in heaven, and it may be there is knowledge, and it may be there is care for us. It may be that, standing on the serene shore beside the Lord, who has already prepared a meal for us with His own hands, they discern, tossing on the darkened sea, the poor little boats of us downhearted, unsuccessful toilers, who cannot yet descry the Lord, or the welcome which waits on the beach.

At all events the thought may come with cheer to our hearts, that, whether conscious of one another's mode of being or no, they in their triumph and we in our toils are bound together with real bonds. The thought, if not the knowledge, of their blessedness may be wafted down to us, just as the thought, if not the knowledge, of our labour may be in their restful souls. The hope of their tranquil shore may strengthen us that are far off upon the sea, though we cannot see more of it than the dim lights moving about, and catch an occasional fragrance in the air that tells of land, just as the memory of their stormy voyage mingles in their experience with their gladness because the waves be quiet, and God has brought them to their desired haven.

Such thoughts may come with encouragement for the conflict, even if we hesitate to assert that the cloud of witnesses is a cloud of spectators. What, then, is the sense in which these heroes of the faith which the previous chapter has marshalled in a glorious bede-roll, are 'witnesses'? The answer will be found by observing the frequent occurrence of the word, and its cognate words, in that chapter. We read there, for instance, that the elders 'had witness borne to them' (verse 2, Revised Version); that Abel by the acceptance of his sacrifice, 'had witness borne to him that he was righteous.' 'God bearing witness in respect of his gifts' (verse 4, Revised Version); that Enoch 'had witness borne to him that he had been well pleasing unto God' (verse 5, Revised Version), and that the whole illustrious succession 'had witness borne to them through their faith' (verse 39, Revised Version). This witness borne to them by God is, of course, His giving to them the blessings which belong to a genuine faith, whether of conscious acceptance with God, or of inward peace and power, or of outward victory over sorrows and foes. But they become witnesses to us for God by the very same facts by which He makes Himself the witness of their faith, for they therein become proofs of the blessedness of true religion, visible evidences of God's faithfulness, and their histories shine out across the centuries testifying to us in our toils how good it is to trust in the Lord, and how small and transient are the troubles and hindrances that a life of faith meets. The calm stars declare the glory of God, and witness from age to age of His power, which keeps them every one from failing; and these bright names that shine in the heaven of His word proclaim His tender pity, and His rewarding love to all who, like them, fight the good fight. Like the innumerable suns that make up the Milky Way, they melt into one bright cloud that lies still and eternal above our heads and sheds a radiance on our dim struggles. So we have here brought out the stimulus to our Christian race from the faith and blessedness of these saints.

We have their history before us: we know what they were, and we have the 'end of their conversation'—that is, the issue or outcome of their manner of life—as the next chapter says. It was a hard fight, but it ended in victory. They had more than their share of sorrows and troubles, but 'the glory dies not, and the grief is past.' From their thrones they call to us words of cheer, and point us to their tears turned into diamonds, to their struggles stilled in depths of repose, to their wounded brows crowned with light and glory.

They witness to us how mighty and divine a thing is a life of faith. Their human weakness was filled with the power of God. Tremblings and self-distrust and all the ills that flesh is heir to dwelt in them. Black doubts and sore conflicts were their portion. They, too, knew what we know, how hard it is to live and do the right. But they fought through, because a mightier hand was upon them, and God's grace was breathed into their weakness—and there they stand, victorious witnesses to us, that whosoever will put his trust in the Lord shall have strength according to his need inbreathed into his uttermost weakness, and have One by his side in every furnace, like unto the Son of Man. They witness to us of companions in suffering, and the thought of them may come to a lonely heart wading in dark, deep waters, with the assurance that there is a ford, and that others have known the icy cold, and the downward rush of the stream, and have not been carried away by it. It is not a selfish thought that sometimes brings encouragement to a solitary sufferer, 'the same afflictions have been accomplished in your brethren.' It helps us to remember the great multitude who before us have come through the great tribulation and are before the throne. The cloud of witnesses testify how impotent is sorrow to harm, how strong to bless those who put their trust in God.

They witness to us of the faithfulness of God, who has led them, and upheld them, through all their conflicts, and has brought them to His side at last. That wondrous power avails for us, fresh and young, as when it helped the world's grey fathers. God refers us to their experiences, and summons them as His witnesses, for they will speak good of His name, and each of them, as they bend down from their seats around the arena, calls to us, 'O love the Lord, all ye His saints. I was brought low and He helped me.' So that we, taking heart by their example, can set ourselves to our struggles with the peaceful confidence, 'This God is our God for ever and ever.'

The word rendered 'witnesses' has a narrower meaning in later usage, according to which it comes to signify those who have sealed their testimony with their blood, in which sense it is transferred, untranslated, into English, in 'martyr.' What an eloquent epitome of the early history of the Church lies in that one fact! So ordinarily had the faithful confessor to die for his testimony that the very name had the thought of a bloody death inextricably associated with it. And if we for a moment think of that meaning, and look back to the long series of martyrs from the days of Stephen to the last Malagasy Christian or missionary, what solemn scorn of soft delights, and noble contempt of life itself may be kindled in our souls. Easy paths are appointed to us. We 'have not yet resisted unto blood.' Let us run our smoother race with patience, as we think of those who ran theirs with bleeding feet, and through the smoke of Smithfield or the dust of the arena beheld the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing ready to help, and so went to their death with the light from His face changing theirs into the same image.

But let us not forget that all these witnesses for God were imperfect men, whose imperfections are full of encouragement for us. Look at the names in that great muster-roll—Noah with his drunkenness, Jacob with his craft, Samson with his giant strength and giant passion, Jephtha with his savage faithfulness to a savage vow, David with his too well-known sins, and in them all not one name to which some great evil did not cling.

There are quickly reached limits to the veneration with which we are to regard the noblest heroes and saints, and none of them are to be to us patterns, however we may draw encouragement from their lives, and in some respects follow their faith. Thank God for the shameful stories told of so many of them in the unmoved narrative of Scripture! They were men of common clay. The saints' halo is round the head of men and women like ourselves. We look at our own sins and shortcomings, and are ready to despair. But we may lift our eyes to the cloud of witnesses and for every evil of ours find a counterpart in the earthly lives of these radiant saints. Thinking of our own evil we may hopefully say, as we gaze on them, 'Such were some of ye, but ye are washed, and ye are sanctified.' Therefore I will not doubt but that He is able to keep me, even me, 'from falling, and to present me faultless before the presence of His glory.'

II. But we are not left to draw encouragement from the remembrance of men of like passions with ourselves only. The second of these clauses turns our thoughts to the contrasted relations between Christ and us, and the stimulus derived from it. 'Looking unto Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.'

Our Lord is here very emphatically set in a place by Himself apart from all that cloud of witnesses, who in their measure are held forth as noble examples of faith. All these, the greatest names of old, are in one class, and He stands above them in a class of which He is the only member. There we see no other man save Jesus only. Whatever be the inference from that fact, the fact itself is plain. He is something to all the fighters in the lists which none of these are. Our eyes may profitably dwell on them, but we have to look higher than their serene seats, even to His throne, and the relation between us and Him is altogether unlike that which binds us to the holiest of these.

The names He bears in this context are noteworthy, 'the author and finisher of faith,' the former being the same word which, in Acts iii. 15, is rendered 'prince' (of life), and in this Epistle (ii. 10), 'captain' (of salvation). Its meaning may perhaps be best given as 'leader.' All these others are the long files of the great army, but Christ is the Commander of the whole array. 'As Captain of the Lord's host am I come up, said the man with the drawn sword, who stood before Joshua as he brooded outside the walls of Jericho over his task, and that armed angel of the Lord was He who, in the fulness of time, took our humanity that He might lead the many sons to glory. Not in order of time, but by the precedence of nature, is He the Leader and Lord of all who live by faith.

He is also the finisher, or more properly the perfecter of faith, inasmuch as He in His own life has shown it in its perfect form and power; inasmuch also as He gives to each of us, if we will have it, grace to perfect it in our lives; and inasmuch as, finally, He crowns and rewards it at last.

One more remark as to the force of the language here may be allowed. The word rendered 'looking' is an emphatic compound, and if full force be given to both its elements, we might read it 'looking away,' that is, turning our eyes from all other, even the grandest of these grand witnesses, to gaze on Christ alone.

All these details serve to bring out the unique position which our Lord holds, and the attitude in which we should stand to Him.

Christ is the one perfect example of faith. We are familiar with the rest of His perfect example in regard to other graces of the Christian character, but we dwell less frequently than we ought on Him as having Himself lived a life of faith. Many orthodox believers so believe in Christ's divinity as to weaken their sense of the reality of His manhood, just as, on the other hand, a vivid apprehension of His manhood obscures to many the rays of His divinity. We lose much by not making very real to our minds that Jesus lived His earthly life by faith, that for Him as for us dependence on God, and humble confidence in Him, were the secret of peace, and the spring of power. This very Epistle, in another place, quotes the words of the psalm, 'I will put my trust in Him,' as the very inmost expression of Christ's life, and as one of the ways in which He proves His brotherhood with us. He, too, knows what it is to hang on God; and is not only in His divine nature the object, but in His true manhood the pattern of our faith.

And His pattern is perfect. In all others, even the loveliest of saints and most heroic of martyrs, the gem is marred by many a streak of baser material, but in Him is the one 'entire and perfect chrysolite.' That faith never faltered, never turned its gaze from the things not seen, never slackened its grasp of the things hoped, nor degenerated into self-pleasing, nor changed its attitude of meek submission. We may look to others for examples, but they will all be sometimes warnings as well, only to Jesus we may look continually and find unsullied purity and perfect faith.

He is more than example. He gives us power to copy His fair pattern. The influence of heroic, saintly lives may be depressing as well as encouraging. Despondency often creeps over us when we think of them. It is not models that we want, for we all know well enough what we ought to be, and an example of supreme excellence in morals or religion may be as hurtful as the unapproachable superiority of Shakespeare or Raphael may to a young aspirant. Perfect patterns will not save the world. They do not get themselves copied. What we want is not the knowledge of what we ought to be, but the will and the power to be it. And that we get from Christ, and from Him alone. He stretches out His hand to hold us up in our poor struggles. His grace and His peace come into our hearts. Looking to Him, His Spirit enters our spirits, and we live, yet not we, but Christ liveth in us. Models will help us little. They stand there like statues on their pedestals, pure marble loveliness; but in Christ the marble becomes flesh, and the lovely perfection has a heart to pity and a strong hand stretched out to help. So let us look away from all others, who can only give us example, to Him who can give us strength. Turn from the circling thrones to the imperial throne in the centre. We are more closely bound to Him who sits on it than to them. Look away from the cloud of witnesses to the sun of our souls, from whom, gazing, we receive warmth and light and life. They may teach us to fight, but He fights in us. They are patterns of faith. So is He, but He is also its object and its giver.

Christ is the imperial Rewarder of faith. At the last He will give the full possession of all which it has looked and hoped for, and will lift it into the nobler form in which, even in heaven, we shall live by faith. In that region where struggles cease, and sense and sight no longer lead astray, and we behold Him as He is, faith still abides, as conscious dependence and happy trust. It is perfected in manner, measure, and reward. And Christ is the giver of all that perfects it.

Let us, then, turn away our eyes from all beside, and look to Christ. He is the Reward as well as the Rewarder of our faith. As we look to Him we shall gain power for the fight, and victory and the crown. The gladiators in the arena lowered their swords to the emperor, before they fought, with the grim greeting 'Hail, Cæsar! the dying salute thee.' So, in happier fashion, our Lord, who has Himself fought in the lists where we now strive. Then we shall have strength for the conflict, and when the conflict is drawing to its end and all else swims before our sight, and the din grows faint in our ears, we shall close our eyes in peace; and when we open them again, lo! the bloody field, and the broken sword, and the battered helm, have all disappeared, and we sit, crowned and palm-bearing, at His side, hailed as victors, and lapped in sweetest rest for ever more!

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE A RACE

'Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.'—HEB. xii. 1.

THE previous clauses of this verse bring before us the runner's position as 'compassed about with a cloud of witnesses,' and his preparation as 'laying aside every weight and . . . sin.' The text carries us a stage further in the metaphor, and shows us the company of runners standing ready, stripped, and straining at the starting-post, with the long course stretching before them.

The metaphor of the Christian life as a race is threadbare, so far as our knowledge is concerned, but it may be questioned if it has sunk deeply enough into the practice of any of us. It is a very noble one, and contains an ideal of the Christian life which it would do us all good to hold up by the side of our realisation of it. It might stimulate and it would shame us.

What is the special note of that metaphor? Compare with the kindred one, equally well-worn and threadbare, of a journey or a pilgrimage. The two have much in common. They both represent life as changeful, continuous, progressive, tending to an end; but the metaphor of the race underscores, as it were, another idea, that of effort. The traveller may go at his leisure, he may fling himself down to rest under a tree, he may diverge from the road, but the runner must not look askance, must not be afraid of dust or sweat, must tax muscle and lungs to the utmost, if, panting, he is to reach the goal and win the prize. So, very significantly, our writer here puts forward only one characteristic of the race. It is to be 'run with patience,' by which great word the New Testament means, not merely passive endurance, noble and difficult as that may be, but active perseverance which presses on unmoved, ay, and unhindered, to its goal in the teeth of all opposition.

But, whilst that is the special characteristic of the metaphor, as distinguished from others kindred to it, and of the ideal which it sets forth, I desire in this sermon to take a little wider sweep, and to try to bring out the whole of the elements which lie in this well-worn figure. I see in it four things: a definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced; a God-appointed path; a steady advance; and a strenuous effort. Now let us ask ourselves the question, Do they correspond to anything in my professing Christian life?

We have here, then

I. A definite aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced.

Most men have aims, definite enough, in regard to lower things, and if you ask the average man out of the ruck what he is living for, he will generally be able to answer curtly and clearly, or at any rate his life will show, even if he cannot put it into words. But all these are means rather than ends; 'I am living to make a big business.' 'I am living to make a fortune.' 'I am living to found a family.' 'I am living to learn a science, an art, a profession.' 'I am living for enjoyment,' etc., etc. Yes, and then suppose somebody perks up with the exceedingly inconvenient further question, 'Well, and what then?' *Then*, all that fabric of life-aims rushes down into destruction, and is manifest for what it is—altogether disproportionate to the man that is pursuing it. Such shabby, immediate 'aims' are not worth calling so. But my text sets forth far beyond, and far above them, the one only goal which it is becoming, which it is natural, which it is anything else than ludicrous, if it were not so tragical, that any man should be pursuing. And what is that mark? You can put it in a hundred different ways. Evangelical Christian people generally say salvation, and a great many so-called Evangelical Christian people have a very low, inadequate, and selfish idea of what they mean by the word. Let us put it in another form. The only aim that it is worthy of a man to live for, as his supreme and dominant one, is that he shall be completely moulded in character, disposition, nature, heart, and will into the likeness of Jesus Christ, who is the image of God, and that he shall pass into no Nirvana of unconsciousness, but into that blessed union with the divine nature, which is not absorption into it, or the weakening of the individual, but the making a man tenfold more himself because he lives in God, as the taper plunged into the jar of oxygen, which burns the brighter for its surroundings, and unlike the taper, is unconsumed by burning. Thus the complete development of human character into the divine image, and the complete union of the human with the divine, is the aim that Christianity sets before us.

And that aim it becomes every one of us professing Christians clearly to apprehend, and keep ever in view as the thing to which we are not merely tending, but to which we are striving. Clearly apprehended, and eagerly embraced, this conception of the purpose of our lives must be if we are not to make them ignoble and conscious or unconscious hypocrisies. But remember that such an aim may be pursued through, and requires for its attainment, all those lower aims and ends which monopolise men's efforts without regard to anything beyond. What we want most is a Christianity which, recognising that great, supreme purpose, follows it persistently and doggedly through all nearer and lesser pursuits. We want our Christian principle to penetrate into all the tissues of our lives, and to bring there healing, purging, and quickening. And if we suppose that the greatest of all aims is contrary to any of these lesser ones, except such of them as are sinful, then we misapprehend both the highest blessedness and good of the nearest objects that are set before us, and still more fatally misapprehend the very genius and intention of that Christianity, which is not unworldliness but the secret of making the world and all its fading sweets subservient to this highest end.

Now, need I say one word as to the nobleness and blessedness of a life which is consistently and thoroughly ordered with a view to this great aim? Think of the unity that thus will be blessedly breathed over all the else bewildering diversity of earthly conditions and occupations. As the moon gathers into one great tidal wave the heaped waters of the shoreless ocean, and mastering currents, and laughing at the opposing powers of the tempest, carries the watery wall round the earth, so the white, pure beam of that aim shining down on the confused welter of our earthly life will draw it all after itself. Think, too, of the power that comes into a life from this unity. A man of one aim is always formidable, and high above all other aims in its absorbing power is this one that a Christian man only deserves his name if he sets and keeps before him. Such a unity will, if I may so say, gather together the whole power of our nature, and bring it into a point, and it will heat it as well as concentrate it. If you take a bit of blunt iron, cold, and try to bore a hole in a ten-inch plank, you will make little progress; but if you sharpen it to a point, and heat it red-hot, then it will penetrate anything. So my life gathered up into one, and heated, by the very fact of its being concentrated, will pierce through all obstacles, and I shall be strong in the proportion in which 'this one thing I do,' and do it through all other things.

I need not remind you, either, of the blessedness which is involved in this unity of aim, clearly apprehended and eagerly embraced, in so far as it will act as a test of all lower pursuits and objects. Wherever there comes a little rill of fresh water down upon the coral reef the creatures that build it die, and the reef disappears, and thus a great aim will kill all lower ones that work in the dark, creeping and crawling, and that are contrary to itself. Further, this supreme aim is supremely blessed, because it will shine ever before us. There is a blessedness in having an object of pursuit which we never reach. It is better to steer straight to the pole-star, though we never get there, than to creep like the old mariners, from headland to headland, and leave behind us sinking on the backward horizon, purpose after purpose, hope after hope, aim after aim. Better to have it shining ahead.

Let me point out the second idea contained in this metaphor, that of

II. A God-appointed path. The race is 'set before us.' Set before us by whom? The course is staked out and determined by the Judge of the games. And that may well be applied in two directions. My duties are appointed by God, and if only we realise that, and bring the thought of His will continually into connection with the smallest of the acts which circumstances, relationships, occupations and the like constitute our duties, how different they all become! It is an entirely different thing to say, 'Being where I am, I must do so-and-so'; or 'Right and wrong being what it is, I must do so-and-so'; or to say, 'This and that man prescribes so-and-so for me'; and to say: 'Thou hast prepared a path for us, and ordained that we should walk therein.' That elevates, that sweetens, that calms us, that smooths the road, makes the rough places plain and the crooked things straight. We want with the clear vision of the aim the equally clear and abiding persuasion that God has appointed the path. A modern thinker said that religion was morality touched by emotion. No, religion is morality transfigured into obedience to the law of God. Bring your duties into connection with His appointment, and they will all be easy; and when the path stretches gloomy before you, and it seems that you are called upon to do some hard thing, say: 'Created unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'

Then there is the other thought that, as the duties are appointed by Him, so the circumstances are appointed, too. You know what they call an obstacle-race, in which the intention is to accumulate as many difficulties in the course as can be crowded into it; I fancy that is a good deal like the race that is set before all of us, by God's wisdom. There are many fences to be climbed, many barriers to be crept under, many deep ditches to be waded through, many bad bits of road studded with sharp points, through which we have to pick our way. We say as to ourselves, and as to our friends, 'What does it all mean?' And the answer is, 'He has set the race before for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness.'

Again, we have here the notion of

III. A steady progress. Continual advance is the very salt of the Christian life, and unless there be such progress there is something fatally wrong with the Christianity. An unprogressive Christianity is very apt to become a moribund and then a dead Christianity. Of course that is so because the aim of which I have been speaking is, in its very nature, inaccessible and yet capable of indefinite approximation. 'Alps upon Alps arise.' Neither in regard to the intellectual or spiritual apprehension of the deep things of God, nor in regard to the incorporation of His likeness into itself, will human nature ever be able to say, 'Lo, I have passed through the land, and know it all.' But an indefinite approximation to an eternally unreached point is a description of a geometrical figure, and it is the description of the Christian life. And, therefore, at no point must we stop, and at no point is it safe for us to say, 'I have apprehended and attained.' Our nature, quite as much as the divine nature towards which we tend, demands this continuous progress, for the human spirit is capable of an indefinite expansion, and the seed of the life kindred to God which is lodged in every believing soul, though it be at the beginning 'less than the least of all,' must grow into a great tree.

Ah, brethren! what a sad contrast to this unbroken progress our lives present to our own consciousness! How many Christian people there are who have almost lost sight of the notion, and have certainly ceased from the practice of an unbroken advance in either of the directions of which I have been speaking, likeness to God or communion with Him! Ask yourselves the question, 'Am I further on than I was this day last year, this day ten years, this day twenty years?' The Japanese gardeners pride themselves on having the secret of dwarfing forest trees, and they will put an oak into a flower-pot; and there it is, only a few inches high, in age a patriarch, in height a seedling. And that is what a great many of you Christian people are doing, dwarfing the tree; even if you are not distorting it.

And now the last thing that I point out here is

IV. The strenuous effort. I have already said a word or two about that as being the *differentia*, the special characteristic, of this metaphor. And I may just refer for one moment to the fact that the word rendered here 'race,' and quite rightly so rendered, literally means a contest—'Let us run the contest that is set before us.' What does that say? Why, just this, that every foot of advance has to be fought; it is not merely 'running,' it is conflict as well. And then, pointing in the same direction, comes the selection in the text, which I have already touched upon, of the one qualification that is necessary — patient endurance, which suggests antagonism. Opposition—where does the opposition come from? The Apostle asked the Galatians that once. 'Ye did run well; what did hinder you?' And the answers are diverse: flowers by the roadside, golden apples flung across the course, siren voices tempting us, the force of gravity holding us back, the pressure of the wind on our faces. Yes, and my own self most of all. That is what hinders, and that is what has to be fought against by myself. Effort, effort, effort is the secret of all noble life, in all departments, and it is the secret of advancing Christian life.

Now, let us understand aright the relations between the faith of which the New Testament makes so much and the effort of which this metaphor makes so much. A great many Christian people seem to fancy that faith supersedes effort. Not so! It stimulates and strengthens effort. If I trust, I receive the power to run, but whether I shall really run or not depends on myself. God gives the ability in Jesus Christ, and then we have to use the ability, and to turn it into an actuality. They have invented a movable platform at the Paris Exhibition, they tell me, on which a man steps, and having stepped upon it is lazily carried to his destination in the building without lifting a foot or moving a muscle. And some people seem to think that Christianity is a platform of that sort, a 'living way,' on which, if once they get, they may be as idle as they like, and they will reach their journey's end. Not so! Not so! By faith we enter on the race; through faith we receive the power that will make us able to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint. But unless *we* run we shall not advance, and unless we advance we shall not attain. Understand, then, that faith is the basis of effort, and effort is the crown of faith. If we will thus trust ourselves to that Lord, and draw from Him the power which He is infinitely willing to give, then the great vision of the prophet will be fulfilled in our case, and we shall find stretching across the low, swampy levels of this world 'a highway,' and it shall be 'a way of holiness, and no ravenous beast shall come up therein, but the redeemed shall walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

WEIGHTS AND SINS

'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us.'
HEB. xii. 1.

THERE is a regular series of thoughts in this clause, and in the one or two which follow it. 'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us—looking unto Jesus.' That is to say, If we would run well, we must run *light*; if we would run light, we must look to Christ. The central injunction is, 'Let us run with patience'; the only way of doing that is the 'laying aside *all* weights and sin'; and the only way of laying aside the weights and sins is, 'looking unto Jesus.'

Of course the Apostle does not mean some one special kind of transgression when he says, 'the sin which doth so easily beset us.' He is speaking about sin generically—all manner of transgression. It is not, as we sometimes hear the words misquoted, '*that* sin which doth *most* easily beset us.' *All* sin is, according to this passage, a besetting sin. It is the characteristic of every kind of transgression, that it circles us round about, that it is always lying in wait and lurking for us. The whole of it, therefore, in all its species, is to be cast aside if we would run with patience this appointed race. But then, besides that, there is something else to be put aside as well as sin. There is 'every weight' as well as every transgression—two distinct things, meant to be distinguished. The putting away of both of them is equally needful for the race. The figure is plain enough. We as racers must throw aside the garment that wraps us round—that is to say, 'the sin that easily besets us'; and then, besides that, we must lay aside everything else which weights us for the race—that is to say, certain habits or tendencies within us.

We have, then, to consider these three points;—First, There are hindrances which are not sins. Secondly, If we would run, we must put aside these. And lastly, If we would put them aside, we must look to Christ.

In the first place, there are hindrances which are not sins. The distinction which the writer draws is a very important one. Sin is that which, by its very nature, in all circumstances, by whomsoever done, without regard to consequences, is a transgression of God's law. A 'weight' is that which, allowable in itself, legitimate, perhaps a blessing, the exercise of a power which God has given us—is, for some reason, a hindrance and impediment in *our* running the heavenly race. The one word describes the action or habit by its inmost essence, the other describes it by its accidental consequences. Sin is sin, whosoever does it; but weights may be weights to me, and not weights to you. Sin is sin in whatever degree it is done; but weights may be weights when they are in excess, and helps, not hindrances, when they are in moderation. The one is a legitimate thing turned to a false use; the other is always, and everywhere, and by whomsoever performed, a transgression of God's law.

Then, what are these weights? The first step in the answer to that question is to be taken by remembering that, according to the image of this text we carry them about *with* us, and we are to put them away from ourselves. It is fair to say then, that the whole class of weights are not so much external circumstances which may be turned to evil, as the feelings and habits of mind by which we abuse God's great gifts and mercies, and turn that which was ordained to be for life into death. The renunciation that is spoken about is not so much the putting away from ourselves of certain things lying round about us, that may become temptations; as the putting away of the dispositions within us which make these things temptations. The other is, of course, included as well; but if we want to understand the true depth of the doctrine of self-denial and self-sacrifice which is taught here, we must remember that the sin and the weights alike lie within our own hearts—that they are our feelings, not God's perfect gifts—that they are our abuse of God's benefits, not the benefits which are given to us for our use. We shall have to see, presently, that by the power which we possess of turning all these outward blessings of God's hands into occasion for transgression, God's most precious endowments may become weights—but let us observe that, accurately and to begin with, the text enjoins us to put away what cleaves to us, and is in us, not what is lying round about us.

Then, if it be mainly and primarily, legitimate feelings and thoughts, abused and exaggerated, which make the weights that we are to lay aside, what are the things which may thus become weights? Oh, brethren! a little word answers that. Everything. It is an awful and mysterious power that which we all possess, of perverting the highest endowments, whether of soul or of circumstances, which God has given us, into the occasions for faltering, and falling back in the divine life. Just as men, by devilish ingenuity, can distil poison out of God's fairest flowers, so we can do with everything that we have, with all the richest treasures of our nature, with the hearts which He has given us that we may love Him with them; with the understandings which He has bestowed upon us, that we may apprehend His divine truth and His wonderful counsel with them; with these powers of work in the world which He has conferred upon us, that by them we may bring to Him acceptable service and fitting offering; and, in like manner, with all the gladness and grace with which He surrounds our life, intending that out of it we should draw ever occasions for thankfulness, reasons for trust, helps towards God, ladders to assist us in climbing heavenward. Ah! and because we cleave to them too much, because we cleave to them not only in a wrong degree but in a wrong manner (for that is the deepest part of the fault), we may make them all hindrances. So, for instance, in a very awful sense is fulfilled that threatening, 'A man's foes shall be they of his own household,' when we make those that we love best our idols, not because we love them too well, but because we love them apart from God; when instead of drawing from those that are dear to us—our husbands, and wives, and children, and parents, and friends, and every other tender name—lessons of God's infinite goodness, and reasons why our hearts should flow perpetually with love to Him—we stay with them, and hang back from God, and forget that His love is best, His heart deepest, and His sufficiency our safest trust. That is one single instance; and as it is in that sacredest of regions, so is it in all others. Every blessing, every gladness, every possession, external to us, and every faculty and attribute within us, we turn into heavy weights that drag us down to this low spot of earth. We make them all sharp knives with which we clip the wings of our heavenward tendencies, and then we grovel in the dust.

And now, if this be the explanation of what the Apostle means by 'weights'—legitimate things that hinder us in our course towards God—there comes this second consideration, If we would run we must lay these aside. Why must we lay them aside? The whole of the Christian's course is a fight. We carry with us a double nature. The best of us know that 'flesh lusts against spirit, and spirit against flesh.' Because of that conflict, it follows that if ever there is to be a positive progress in the Christian race, it must be accompanied, and made possible, by the negative process of casting away and losing much that interferes with it. Yes! that race is not merely the easy and natural unfolding of what is within us. The way by which we come to 'the measure of the stature of perfect men' in Christ, is not the way by which these material bodies of ours grow up into their perfectness. They have but to be nourished, and they grow. 'The blade and the ear, and the full corn in the ear,' come by the process of gradual growth and increase. That law of growth is used by our Lord as a description, but only as a partial description, of the way by which the kingdom of Christ advances in the heart. There is another side to it as well as that. The kingdom advances by warfare as well as by growth. It would be easy if it were but a matter of getting more and more; but it is not that only. Every step of the road you have to cut your way through opposing foes. Every step of the road has to be marked with the blood that comes from wounded feet. Every step of the road is won by a tussle and a strife. There is no spiritual life without dying, there is no spiritual growth without putting off 'the old man with his affections and lusts.' The hands cannot move freely until the bonds be broken. The new life that is in us cannot run with patience the race that is set before it, until the old life that is in us is put down and subdued. And if we fancy that we are to get to heaven by a process of persistent growth, without painful self-sacrifice and martyrdom, we know nothing about it. That is not the law. For every new step that we win in the Christian course there must have been the laying aside of something. For every progress in knowledge, there must have been a sacrifice and martyrdom of our own indolence, of our own pride, of our own blindness of heart, of our own perverseness of will. For every progress in devout emotion, there must have been a crucifying and slaying of our earthly affections, of our wavering hearts that are drawn away from God by the sweetness of this world. For every progress in strenuous work for God, there must have been a slaying of the selfishness which urges us to work in our own strength and for our own sake. All along the Christian course there must be set up altars to God on which you sacrifice yourselves, or you will never advance a step. The old legend that the Grecian host lay weather-bound in their port, vainly waiting for a wind to come and carry them to conquest; and that they were obliged to slay a human sacrifice ere the heavens would be propitious and fill their sails, may be translated into the deepest verity of the Christian life. We may see in it that solemn lesson—no prosperous voyage, and no final conquest until the natural life has been offered up on the altar of hourly self-denial. That self-denial must reach beyond gross and undoubted sins. *They* must be swept away, of course, but deeper than these must the sacrificial knife strike its healing wound. If you would 'run with patience,' you must 'lay aside every weight,' as well as 'the sin which so easily besets you.'

So much for the *why*; well, then, *how* is this laying aside to be performed? There are two ways by which this injunction of my text may be obeyed. The one is, by getting so strong that the thing shall not be a weight, though we carry it; and the other is that feeling ourselves to be weak, we take the prudent course of putting it utterly aside. Or, to turn that into other words: the highest type of the Christian character would be, that we should, as the Apostle says, 'use the world without abusing it'—that 'they who possess should be as though they possessed not; and they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not.' The noblest style of a Christian would be a man, who exercising all the faculties which God had given him, and enjoying all the blessings wherewith God had surrounded him, walked his Christian course like some of those knights of old, lightly bearing his heavy mail, not feeling it a burden, but strong enough to bear the massive breastplate and to wield the ponderous sword, and fitted for his rough warfare by it all. It would be possible, perhaps, some day for us to come to this—that inasmuch as it is the feelings within us which make the weights, and not the objects without us—we should keep and enjoy the blessings and the gladness that we possess, and yet never thereby be thwarted or stayed in our journey heavenward. It would be the highest condition. I suppose we shall come to it yonder, where there will no longer be any need to maim ourselves that we may 'enter into life,' but where all the maimings that were done in this world for the sake of entering into life, shall be compensated and restored, and each soul shall stand perfect and complete, wanting nothing.

But, alas! though that course be the highest, the abstract best, the thing for which we ought to strive and try; it is not the course for which the weakness and inaptness of the most of us makes us strong enough. And therefore, seeing that we have a nature so weak and feeble, that temptations surround us so constantly, that so many things legitimate become to us harmful and sinful—the path of prudence, the safe path, is absolutely and utterly to put them away from us, and have nothing to do with them.

Of course, there are many duties which, by our own sinfulness, we make weights, and we dare not, and we cannot if we would, lay *them aside.* A man, for instance, is born into certain circumstances, wherein he must abide; he has 'a calling whereunto he is called.' Your trade is a weight, your daily occupations are weights. The spirit of this commandment before us is not, 'Leave your plough, and go up into the mountain to pray.' Again, a man finds himself surrounded by friends and domestic ties. He dare not, he must not, he cannot, shake himself free from these. There are cases in which to put away the occupation that has become a weight—to sacrifice the blessing that has become a hindrance—to abstain from the circumstances which clog and impede our divine life, is a sin. Where God sets us, we *must* stand, if we die. What God has given us to do, we *must* do. The *duties* that in our weakness become impediments and weights, we *must not* leave.

But for all besides these, anything which I know has become a snare to me—unless it be something in the course of my simple duty, or unless it be some one of those relations of life which I cannot get rid of—I must have done with it! It may be sweet, it may be very dear, it may lie very near thy heart, it may be a part of thy very being:—never mind, put it away! If God has said to you, There, my child, stand there, surrounded by temptations!—then, like a man, stand to your colours, and do not take these words as if they said—I am to leave a place because I find myself too weak to resist—a place in which God, for the good of others or for the good of myself, has manifestly set me. But for all other provinces of life, if I feel myself weak I shall be wise to fly. As Christ has said, 'If thy hand offend thee,' put it down on the block there, and take the knife in the other, 'and cut it off': it is better, it is *better* for thee to go into life with that maimed and bleeding stump, an imperfect man, than with all thy natural capacities and powers to be utterly lost at the last! And some of us, perhaps, may feel that these solemn lessons apply not only to affection and outward business. I may be speaking to some young man to whom study, and thought, are a snare. I know that I am saying a grave thing, but I do say, In that region too, the principle applies. Better be ignorant, and saved, than wise, and lost. Better a maimed man in Christ's fold, than a perfect man, if that were possible, outside of it.

I know that there is a large field for misconception and misapplication in the settlement of the practical question—Which of my weights arise from circumstances that I dare not seek to alter, and which from circumstances that I dare not leave unaltered? There is a large margin left for the play of honesty of purpose, and plain common-sense, in the fitting of such general maxims to the shifting and complicated details of an individual life. But no laws can be laid down to save us that trouble. No man can judge for another about this matter. It must be our own sense of what harms our spiritual life, and not other people's notions of what is likely to harm either theirs or ours, that guides us. What *by experience* I find does me harm, let me give up! No man has a right to come to me and say, *There* is a legitimate thing, an indifferent thing; it is not a sin; there is not in it, in itself, the essential element of transgression; but you must forsake it, because it is a weight to other people! To my own master I stand or fall. The commandment is, Have no weights! But the way to fulfil that commandment—whether by rejecting the thing altogether, or by keeping it, and yet not letting it be a weight, that is a matter for every one's own conscience, for every one's own judgment and practical prudence, guided by the Spirit of God, to determine. The obedience to the commandment is a simple matter of loyalty to Christ. But the manner of obedience is to be fixed by Christian wisdom. And remember that on both sides of the alternative there are dangers. There is danger in the too great freedom which says, I am strong; I can venture to do this thing—another man cannot—and I *will* do it! There is a danger on the other side in saying, We are all weak, and we will forsake all these things together! The one class of moralists are apt to confound their own unsanctified inclinations with the dictates of Christian freedom. The other class are apt to confound their own narrowness with the commandments of God. The one class are apt to turn their liberty into a cloak of licentiousness. The other class are apt to turn their obligation into a yoke which neither they nor their disciples are able to bear. The Apostle pointed out the evils which these two ways of dealing with things indifferent are apt to foster when he said to those who adopt the one, 'Let not him that eateth *despise* him that eateth not'; and to those who adopt the other 'Let not him which eateth not *judge* him that eateth.' That is to say, on the one hand, beware of the fancied superiority to the weaknesses and narrowness of your more scrupulous brother, which is prone to creep into the hearts of the more liberal and strong. Remember that perhaps the difference between you is not all in your favour. It may be that what you call over-scrupulous timidity is the fruit of a more earnest Christian principle than yours; and that what you call in yourself freedom from foolish scruples, is only the result of a less sensitive conscience, not of a more robust Christianity. Then for the other class, the lesson is, 'Let not him which eateth not, *judge* him that eateth.' Judge not from the height of your superior self-denial, your brother who allows himself what you avoid. Your besetting sin is self-righteous condemnation of those who perhaps, after all, are wiser as well as wider than you, and who in their strength may be able to walk as near to God on a road, which to you would be full of perils, as you are in the manner of life which you know to be needful for you. Let us all remember, besides, that a thing which to ourselves is no weight, may yet be right for us to forsake, out of true and tender brotherly regard to others who, weaker than we, or perhaps more conscientious than we, could not do the same thing without damaging their spirits and weakening their Christian life. 'Him that is weak in the faith, receive.' Him that is weak in the faith, help. And in all these matters indifferent, which are weights to one and not weights to another, let us remember, first, for ourselves, that a weight retained is a sin; and let us remember, next, for others, that they stand not by our experience, but by their own; and that we are neither to judge their strength, nor to offend their weakness.

And now, in the last place: This laying aside of every weight is only possible by looking to Christ. That self-denial of which I have been speaking has in it no merit, no worthiness. The man that practises it is not a bit better than the man that does not, except in so far as it is a preparation for greater reception of the spiritual life. Some people suppose that when they have laid aside a weight, conquered a hindrance, given up some bad habit, they have done a meritorious thing. Well, we are strengthened, no doubt, by the very act; but then, it is of no use at all except in so far as it makes us better fitted for the positive progress which is to come after it. What is the use of the racer betaking himself to the starting-post, and throwing aside every weight, and then standing still? He puts aside his garments *that he may run.* We empty our hearts; but the empty heart is dull, and cold, and dark: we empty our hearts that Christ may fill them.

That is not all: Christ must have begun to fill them before we can empty them. 'Looking to Jesus' is the only means of thorough-going, absolute self-denial. All other surrender than that which is based upon love to Him, and faith in Him, is but surface work, and drives the subtle disease to the vitals. The man that tries, by paring off an excrescence here, and giving up a bad habit there, to hammer and tinker and cut himself into the shape of a true and perfect man, may do it outwardly. He will scarcely do that, but it is possible he *may* partially. And then, what has he made himself? 'A whited sepulchre'; outside,—adorned, beautiful, clean; inside,—full of rottenness and dead men's bones! The self that was beaten in the open field of outward life, retires, like a defeated army, behind broad rivers; and concentrates itself in its fortresses, and prepares hopefully for a victorious resistance in the citadel of the heart.

My brother, if you would 'run with patience the race that is set before you,' you must 'lay aside every weight.' If you would lay aside every weight, you must look to Christ, and let His love flow into thy soul. Then, self-denial will not be self-denial. It will be blessing and joy, sweet and easy. Just as the old leaves drop naturally from the tree when the new buds of spring begin to put themselves out, let the new affection come and dwell in thy heart, and expel the old. 'Lay aside every weight'—'looking unto Jesus.' Then, too, you will find that the sacrifice and maiming of the old man has been the perfecting of *the man*. You will find that whatever you give up for Christ you get back from Christ, better, more beautiful, more blessed, hallowed to its inmost core, a joy and a possession for ever. For He will not suffer that any gift laid upon His altar shall not be given back to us. He will have no maimed man in His service. So, the hand that is cut off, the eye that is plucked out, the possessions that are rendered up, the idols that are slain—they are all given back to us again when we stand in God's own light in glory—perfect men, made after the image of Christ, and surrounded with all possessions transfigured and glorified in the light of God. 'There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

THE PERFECTER OF FAITH

'Set down at the right hand of the throne of God.'—Heb. xii. 2.

St. Luke gives us two accounts of the Ascension, one at the end of his Gospel and one at the beginning of the Acts. The difference of position suggests delicate shades of colouring and of distinction in the two narratives, the one is the ending of the sweet intercourse on earth, the other is the beginning of a new era and a different type of companionship. So in that which closes the Gospel, emphasis is put upon our Lord's ascension as being *parted from;* and all that is told us is of the final benediction befitting a farewell, and of the uplifted hands, which left upon their minds the last sweet impression of the departing friend. But if we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, where the incident is the same, the whole spirit of the narrative is altered. We see there the beginning of a new era, and so we read nothing about parting, but, instead of the indefinite expression, *He blessed them*, we hear of their promised investiture with a new power, and of there being laid upon them a new obligation—'Ye shall be clothed with the Spirit: ye shall be My witnesses.' And the two men who stand by them, and are only mentioned in the Book of Acts, announce the great thought, that the departing Christ will return, 'He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' All in that account has a forward aspect. It is a beginning with a new power, strengthened by a new duty, and having a far-off hope. Thus equipped, these eleven no more feel that their Lord is parted from them, nor that they are abandoned and forlorn; but they cast themselves into their new circumstances, and joyfully take up their new work. So the Ascension of Christ is represented in that second account as being the transition from the earthly to the heavenly life and type of communion with Him, and as the preparation for that great fact which my text enshrines in highly figurative language, as being the sitting at the right hand of the throne of God. The Ascension is no transient fact, it is the beginning of the permanent condition of the Church, and of the permanent present relations between Jesus Christ, God, the Church, and the world. So I desire to turn now to the various characteristics of the present and permanent relationship of Jesus Christ to these three—God, the Church, the world.

And first of all I wish to notice we have here the thought of the Enthroned Christ. The attitude of sitting indicates repose. The position at the right hand of the throne of God indicates participation in the divine energies and in the administration of the divine providences. But the point to observe is that the Ascension is declared to be the prerogative of the Man Christ Jesus. And so with great emphasis and significance, in the verse with a part of which I am now dealing, we have brought together the name of the humanity, the name that was borne by many another Jew in the same era as Jesus bore it, we have brought together the name of the humanity and the affirmation of the divine dignity, 'We see *Jesus* . . . set down at the right hand of the throne of God.' And over and over again, not only in this Epistle, but in other parts of Scripture, we have the same intentional, emphatic juxtaposition of the two ideas which shallow thinkers regard as in some sense incompatible—the humanity and the divinity.

Remember, for instance, 'this same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go.' And remember the rapturous and wonderful exclamation which broke from the lips of the proto-martyr, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' So then that exaltation and ascension is—according to New Testament teaching, which is not contradicted by the deepest thought of the affinities and resemblances of the divine and the human—the lifting up of the *Man* into the glory which the Incarnate Word had with the Father before the world was. And just as the earthly life of that Incarnate Word has shown how divine a thing a human life here may be, so the heavenly life of the still Incarnate Word shows us what our approximation to, and union with, the divine nature may be, when we are purged and perfected in the Kingdom of God, whither the Forerunner is for us entered.

But further, in addition to this thought, there comes another which is constantly associated with the teaching of this session of the Son of Man at the right hand of God, namely, that it is *intercessory*. That is a word the history of which will take us far, and I dare not enter upon it now. But one thing I wish to make very emphatic, and that is that the ordinary notion of intercession is not the New Testament notion. We limit it, or tend to limit it, to prayer for others. There is no such idea in the New Testament use of the phrase. It is a great deal wider than any verbal expression of sympathy and desire. It has to deal with realities and not with words. It is not a synonym for asking for another that some blessing may come upon him; but the intercession of the great High Priest who has gone into the holiest of all for us covers the whole ground of the acts by which, by reason of our deep and true union with Jesus Christ through faith, He communicates to His children whatsoever of blessing and power and sweet tokens of ineffable love He has received from the Father. Whatsoever He draws in filial dependence from the Divine Father He in brotherly unity imparts to us; and the real communication of real blessing, and not the verbal petitions for forgiveness, is what He is doing there within the veil. 'He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.'

But still further in this great figure of my text, the Enthroned Christ, there lies a wondrous thought which He Himself has given us, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' What activities are involved in that wondrous idea it boots us not to inquire, nor would it become us to say. We know that never could we tread those pure pavements except our robes and our feet had been washed by Him. But that is the consequence of His earthly work, and not of His heavenly and present energy. Perhaps in our ignorance of all that lies behind the veil, we can get little further than to see that the very fact of His presence is the preparation of the place. For that awful thought, that crushing thought, of eternal life under conditions bewilderingly different from anything we experience here, would be no joy unless we could say we shall see Him and be with Him. I know not how it may be with you, but I think that the nearer we come to the end of the earthly life, and the more the realities beyond begin to press upon our thoughts and our imaginations as those with which we shall soon make acquaintance, we feel more and more how unquestionable the misery the thought of eternal life would bring if it were not for the fact that the world beyond is lighted up and made familiar by the thought of Christ's presence there. Can you fancy some poor clod-hopping rustic brought up from a remote village and set down all in a moment in the midst of some brilliant court? How out of place he would feel, how unhomelike it would appear, how ill at ease he would be; ay, and what an unburdening there would be in his heart, if amongst the strange splendour he detected beneath the crown and above the robes, sitting on the throne, one whom he had known in the far-off hamlet, and who there had taken part with him in all the ignoble toils and narrow interests of that rustic scene. Jesus said, 'I go to prepare a place for you,' and when I lift up my eyes to those far-off realities which overwhelm me when I try to think about them, I say, I am not dazzled by the splendour, I am not oppressed by the perpetuity of it, I do not faint at the thought of unlike conditions, for I shall be the same and He will be with me.

'It is enough that Christ knows all,
And I shall be with Him.'

And so the Enthroned Christ is preparing a place for us. Ay, brethren, and He is not preparing it for us only when we die, but He is preparing it for us whilst we live; for it is only by faith in Him that we have boldness of access and confidence. And neither for the prayers and desires of Christian men on earth nor for the spirits of just men made perfect hereafter will the eternal golden gates swing open except His hand is on the bolt, and by His power the way into the Holiest is made manifest. And so set your minds as well as your affections on the things above, where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God.

Now, secondly, we have here the *Present Christ.* Matthew, in his Gospel, does not tell of the Ascension, but he preserves the promise, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world,' and that promise is not contradicted, but is realised by the fact of Christ's ascension. He does tell us of the remarkable utterance to Mary on the morning of the Resurrection. 'Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father.' The implication that we have plainly is, when I am ascended you may touch. And the contact of even her nervous and clutching hand round His feet is less than the touch and the presence for which that departure makes the way. 'He was parted from them' is the thought that ends the Gospel. He was parted for a season that thou mightest receive Him for ever, is the thought that begins the Acts and the history of the Church. And it is true of Him and His relation to us, and because it is true about Him and about His relation to us, it is also true about all those who sleep in Jesus. Their relation towards the earthly form ceases, and there is an empty place where they once stood.

But there is a presence more real and capable of yielding finer influences, strengthening and sanctifying, than ever came from the earthly presence. It is blessed to clasp hands, it is blessed to link arms, it is blessed to press together the lips; but there is a higher touch than these, and sight is a less clear vision than faith; and they who can pass across the abyss of the centuries and the yet broader and deeper and blacker abyss between earth and heaven, and lay the hand of faith on the hand of Christ, have passed through the veil, that is to say His flesh, and have clasped His real presence. Yes, and the thing that calls itself such, is but a part of the general retrogression of Catholicism to heathenism and materialism. We have the real presence if we have the Christ in our heart by faith. He is present with us; enthroned on high above all heavens, He yet is near the humblest heart, the companion of the lonely, the solace of all that trust Him. 'He trod the winepress alone,' in order that none of us need ever live alone or die alone.

And there is another side to this presence. As I have said, He is present with us here, and you and I may be present with Him yonder; for one of the Epistles tells us that, 'we die with Him that we may live with Him, and that God has quickened us (if we are Christian people) together with Him and made us sit together with Him in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Your life, Christian men and women, is in its roots and sources, and ought to be in its flow and course, 'hid with Christ in God,' and you should not only seek to realise the presence of the Master with you, but to climb to Himself, being present with Him.

Thirdly, this great figure of my text sets before us the working Christ. The attitude of sitting at the right hand of God suggests repose; but that is a repose which is consistent with, and is accompanied by, the greatest energy for continuous operation. You remember, no doubt (although, perhaps, not in its full significance), the great words with which the close of St. Mark's Gospel points on to the future, 'So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went everywhere preaching the word.' The Master gone, the servants left; the Master resting, the servants journeying and toiling. It is like the two halves of Raphael's great transfiguration picture. The Lord and the three are up there in the amber light, the demoniac boy writhing in his convulsions, and the disciples by him helpless, down here. The gap is great. Yes. 'They went everywhere preaching the Word, the Lord also working with them, and confirming the Word with signs following.' There is the true notion of the repose of Christ resting indeed at the right hand of God, yet working with His servants scattered over the face of the earth. And so in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, the keynote is struck when St. Luke says, 'The former treatise have I made of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day on which He was taken up'; and *this* treatise, O Theophilus, is the second volume of the one story, the history of all that Jesus continued both to do and to teach after the day on which He was taken up. Acts of the Apostles? No; Acts of the Ascended Christ—that is the name of the book. Never mind about the apostles. They do come into the foreground; but the writer has little care about them. It is the Christ who is moving; and so we find it all through the book, the Lord did this, the Lord did that, the Lord did the other thing; and the apostles are, I was going to say, the pawns on the chess-board. And so you remember, too, that dying Stephen saw the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. He sprang to his feet, not breaking the eternal repose, to look down and to send down help and sustenance and blessing and good cheer to the man there at the foot of the old wall ready to die for Him.

And that is the type of the whole history of the Church. I have said that Christ's Ascension is the transition from the lower to the higher form of presence; and it is the transition to the wider form of work. He works for us, on us, in us, and with us, and as the apostle Peter said in expounding the significance of the Day of Pentecost, 'Being to the right hand of God exalted He hath shed forth this,' so the Christ is no longer tired, but is still working, working in us, with us, and for us.

And lastly, the metaphor of my text brings before us the returning Christ. It was not only the angel's message that declared that departure and ascension were not the last that the worker was going to see of Jesus. The necessities of the case, if I may say so, tell us the same message. The Incarnation necessarily involves the Crucifixion; the Crucifixion (if it is what we believe it to be) as necessarily involves the Resurrection, 'for it was not possible that He should be holden of it,' the grim death. The Resurrection and the Ascension are but as it were the initial point, which is produced into the line of His heavenly session. It cannot be that Ascension is the last word to be said. The path of the King does not run into a *cul de sac* like that. The world has not done with Jesus Christ. *He is coming*, was the great thought around which all the past clustered. He will come, is the great hope around which all the future hopes for the Church and the world are piled and built. 'He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go,' corporeally, visibly, locally, in His manhood, in His divinity. 'As He was once offered to bear the sin of many, so shall He come the second time without sin unto salvation.' Brethren, that is the hope of the Church, discredited by many unworthy representations and mixed up with a great deal that does not commend it by the folly of those who believe in it; but standing out so distinct and so required by all that is gone before, that no Christian man can afford to relegate the expectation into the region of dimness, or to waver in his faith in it, without much imperilling his conception of his Master, and the blessedness of union with Him. You do not understand the Cross unless you believe in the throne; and you do not understand the throne unless you believe in the judgment-seat. The returning Christ shall judge the world. Brethren! Jesus is enthroned. Do you bow to His command? Do you trust His power? Do you see in Him the pattern of what you may be, and the pledge that you will be it if you put your confidence in your Lord? The enthroned Christ is present. Do you walk in blessed and continuous communion with Him? The enthroned and present Christ is working. Do you trust in His operation, peacefully, for yourself, for the Church, for the world? Do you open your heart to the abundant energies with which He is flooding His Church, and which His Church is so sadly and so much allowing to run to waste? The enthroned, present, working Christ is coming back, and you and I have to choose whether we shall be of 'the servants whom the Lord, when He cometh, shall find watching,' and obeying His command with girt loins and lit lamps, and so will sweep with Him into the festal hall, and sit down with Him, on His throne; or whether we shall wail because of Him, and shrink abashed from the judgment-seat of Christ.

RESISTING UNTO BLOOD

'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.'—Heb. xii. 4.

'YE have not yet resisted'—then others had done so; and the writer bids his readers contrast their own comparative immunity from persecution from the fate of such, in order that they may the more cheerfully do the easier task devolved upon them. Who were those others?

If the supposition of many is correct that this Epistle was addressed to the Mother Church at Jerusalem, the fate of Stephen the first martyr, and of James the brother of John, who had 'had the rule over' that Church, may have been in the writer's mind. If the date assigned to the letter by some is accepted, the persecution under Nero, which had lighted the gardens of the Capitol with living torches, had already occurred; and the writer may have wished the Jerusalem Church to bethink themselves that they had fared better than their brethren in Rome. But whether these conjectures are adopted or no, there is another contrast evidently in the writer's mind. He has been speaking of the long series of heroes of the faith, some of whom had been 'stoned and sawn asunder,' and he would have the Christians whom he addresses contrast their position with that of these ancient saints and martyrs. And there is another contrast more touching still, more wonderful and impressive, in his mind; for my text follows immediately upon a reference to Jesus Christ, 'who endured the Cross, despising the shame.' So Himself 'had resisted unto blood.' And thus the writer bids his readers think of the martyrs in the Mother Church; of the blood that had deluged the

Church at Rome; of the slaughtered saints in past generations; and, above all, of the great Captain of their salvation; and, animated by the thoughts, manfully to bear and mightily to resist in the conflict that is laid upon them. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.'

I. So then, we have here, to begin with, the permanent condition of the Christian life, as one of warfare and resistance.

The imagery of the whole context is drawn from the arena. A verse or two before the writer was speaking about the race. Now he slightly shifts his point of view, and is speaking rather about the wrestling or the pugilistic encounters that were there waged. And his point is that always, and everywhere, however the forms may vary in which the conflict is carried on, there is inseparable from the Christian life an element of effort, endurance and antagonism. That is worth thinking about for a moment. It is all very well to sing of green pastures and still waters, and to rejoice in the blessings, the consolations, the tranquillities, the raptures of Christian experience, and to rejoice in the thought of the many mercies for body and soul which come to men through faith. That is all true and all blessed, but it is only one side of the truth. And unless we have apprehended, and have reduced to practice and experience the other side of the Christian life, which makes it a toil and a pain to the lower self, and a continual resistance, I venture to say that we have no right to the soothing and sweet and tender side of it; and have need to ask ourselves whether we know anything about Christianity at all. It is not given to us merely—it is not given to us chiefly—to secure those great and precious things which it does secure, but it is given to us in order that, enriched and steadied and strengthened by the possession of them, we should be the better fit for the conflict, just as a wise commander will see that his soldiers are well fed before he flings them into the battle.

But then, passing from that, which is only a side issue, let me remind you of what our antagonist is—'striving against *sin*.'

Now some people would take my text to mean solely the conflict which each of us has to wage with our own evils, meannesses and weaknesses. And some, guided by the context, would take the reference to be exclusively to the antagonisms with evils round about us, and with the embodiment of these in men who do not share Christian views of life or conduct. But I think that neither the one nor the other of these two exclusive interpretations can be maintained. For sin is one, whether embodied in ourselves or embodied in men or in institutions. And we have the same conflict to wage against precisely the same antagonist when we are occupied in the task of purging ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and when we are occupied in the wider task of seeking to bring every man to recognise the power of Christ's love, and to live in purity by obedience to Him.

And so, the first field on which every Christian is to win his spurs, to prove his prowess, and to exercise his strength is the field within, where the lists are very narrow, and where self wages war against self in daily conflict. Every man of us carries his own worst enemy inside his own waistcoat. We have all lusts, passions, inclinations, desires, faults, vices, meannesses, selfishnesses, indolences,—a whole host of evils lying there like a nest of vipers within us, and our first task, and our lifelong task, is to take the sting and the poison out of these, and to throttle them and to cast them out.

And then, and only after that, there comes the next thing—viz., the antagonism in which Christian men must permanently stand to a world which does not sympathise with their views, which is strange to the maxims that rule their lives, and which renders no fealty to the King whom they are sworn to obey. And that antagonism runs out into various forms.

First of all, it is the solemn duty of every Christian to wage war so as to prevent himself from being caught up in the current of godless living which prevails round him. We have to fight to keep ourselves from being harmed by the world and the worldly communities amidst which we dwell. What would become of the captain of a ship who did not take care to have his compass corrected so as to neutralise the effects of all the mass of iron in his vessel? You walk as in the wards of a hospital. If you do not take precautions you will catch the disease that is in the air. It is as certain that careless Christian people who do not ever keep on guard against impending and surrounding evil shall be infected by it, as it is certain that if an Englishman goes out, say to the United States, he will come back with the intonations of our brethren on the other side of the Atlantic slipping unconsciously from his tongue. The first duty, imperative upon Christian people, is to realise that they live in the midst of an order of things that is not in accordance with the Master's principles, and so to beware that they do not catch the infection.

I do not need to say a word about the other form of antagonism, which is equally imperative, and which will prevent us from caring much about the judgments that may be formed of us by the people round us. 'With me it is a very small matter that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment.'

But the resistance against sin, which is the Christian man's merciful warfare in the world, is not completed either by his keeping himself from complicity with surrounding evils or by his refusing to let antagonism divert him from his course. There is something more that is plain duty, and that is, that every Christian should be Christ's soldier in the attempt to get Christ's commandments recognised, and the principles of His word obeyed, in the world.

Society is not organised on Christian principles. You have only to look around you to see that. I do not need to dwell upon the various discordances between the plain teachings of this Book and every community, and every nation, and every individual; but let me remind you that until the Sermon on the Mount is the law for individuals and communities, the Christian man, if he is loyal to his Lord, must be 'striving against sin' in the endeavour to get established Christ's kingdom, which is the kingdom of righteousness. That sermon does not contain all Christian truth, but it is the Magna Charta of an applied Christianity; the laws of the kingdom from the lips of the King Himself.

So, brethren, I come to you with this for my message, that no Christian man is doing his work as Christ's soldier, 'striving against sin,' until he is seeking, with the best of his strength, to get Christ's law, which is righteousness, established on the face of the earth.

Talk of dynamiters and explosives, why, there is explosive power enough in Christianity to shatter to pieces the corruptions which make so large a part of modern social life. But, alas! the Christian Church has too long and too generally been employed in damping down the gunpowder instead of firing it, and seeking to explain away the large and plain commandments of the Master, instead of seeking to apply them.

There is a new spirit springing up around us to-day, for which we should be devoutly thankful, whilst at the same time we must forget that, like all new movements, it is apt to be one-sided and exaggerated. Much harm is done, I believe, in many directions by Christian teachers seeking to apply the principles of Christ's commandments to various phases of social iniquity without a clear knowledge of the facts of the case. But that being fully admitted, I still rejoice to believe that Christ's men round about us are waking up, as they never did before, to the solemn obligation laid upon Christian churches, if they are not to perish of inanition and inactivity, to proclaim and seek to have recognised Christ's laws for the individual and Christ's law for the community.

Only remember the limitations and the antecedents about which I have already spoken a word. No man has any business to go crusading among other people until he has cleansed himself. And the first task of the Christian reformer is with his own heart. And again, it is useless to deal with institutions unless you deal with the men who live under them. The main work of the Christian Church must ever be with individuals, and through their improvement the improvement of society will be most fully secured. But the error of many good and earnest men to-day is in thinking that if you set the 'environment,' as they call it, right you will get the men right. It is a mistake. Take a pack of drunken wastrels out of the slums and put them into model lodging-houses, and in a fortnight the lodging-houses will be as dirty as the sties from which the men were dragged. Mend the men, and then you may hopefully set them in new environment; mend the men, and society will be mended. And, mend yourselves first, and then you will be able to mend society. Resist your own sin, and then go out to fight with the sin of others.

II. Notice the brunt of the battle which has been borne by others.

I have already said that the immediate context suggests two contrasts between the comparative immunity from persecution of the readers of the letter and certain others.

The first is that suggested by all that glorious muster-roll of heroes and martyrs of the faith which precedes this chapter. And I may say without dealing in rhetoric, or dilating on the subject, that Christian men in this generation may well bethink themselves of what it was that their fathers bore, and did, that has won for them this ease.

I remember an old church, on the slopes of one of the hills of Rome, which is covered over on all its interior walls with a set of the most gruesome pictures of the martyrs. There may be an unwholesome admiration and adoration of these. I think modern Christianity, in its complacency with itself, and this marvellous nineteenth century, of which we are so proud, would be all the better if it went back sometimes to remember that there were times when 'young men and maidens, and old men and children,' had to resist to blood; and when they went to their deaths as joyfully as a bride to the altar.

Ah, brethren! you Nonconformists in this generation, who have an easy-going religion, do not always remember how it was won. Think of George Fox and the Friends. Think of the early Nonconformists, hunted and harried, their noses slit and ears cropped off, their pillories and exile, and then be ashamed to talk about the difficulties that you have to meet. '*Ye* have not resisted unto blood.'

There is a far more touching contrast suggested, and apparently mainly in the writer's mind, because just before he has said, 'Consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners.' The word that he employs for 'consider' might be rendered 'compare, weigh in the balance,' Christ's sufferings and yours. He has borne the heavy end of the Cross of which He lays the light end upon our shoulders. Of course the more mysterious and profound aspects of Christ's death, in which He is no pattern for us, but the propitiation for our sins, do not come into view in this contrast. They are abundantly treated in the rest of the letter. But here the writer is thinking of Jesus Christ in His capacity of the Prince of sufferers for righteousness' sake, who could have escaped His Cross if He had chosen to abandon His warfare and His witness. Jesus Christ is a great deal more than that. And the *differentia* of His sufferings and death is not touched by such a consideration. But do not let us forget that He *is* that, and that whatever else His death is, it stands also as being the very climax of all suffering for righteousness. He is the King of the martyrs as well as the Sacrifice for the world's sin. Let us turn to Him, and mark the heroic strength of character, hidden from hasty observation by the sweet gentleness in which it was enshrined, like the iron hand in a velvet glove. Let us understand how His pattern is held forth to us, and how the Cross is our example, as well as the ground of all our hope. 'Ye have not yet resisted. . . . Consider Him.'

III. And now, lastly, note the lighter warfare incumbent upon us.

The resistance changes its form, but in essence it continues. In old days warfare consisted in men bludgeoning each other, or engaging in hand-grips foot to foot and face to face. Nowadays it is artillery duels—a great deal more scientific, a great deal less coarse; but it is warfare all the same. The world used to burn Christians, to hang them, to stone them. It does not do that now, but it fights them yet. The world has become partially Christianised, and the principles of Christianity have, in a certain imperfect way, infiltrated themselves through the mass, so that the antagonism is not quite as hot as it once was. And the Church has weakened its testimony and largely adopted the maxims of the world. So why should the world persecute a Church which is only a bit of the world under another name? But let any man for himself honestly try to live a life modelled on Christ's maxims, and let him cast himself against some of the clamant evils round about him, and seek to subdue them, because Christ has bidden him, and he will see whether the old antagonism is not there yet. What a chorus of select epithets will immediately be discharged! 'Impracticable,' 'fanatical,' 'one-sided,' 'revolutionary,' 'sour visaged,' 'Pharisee,' 'hypocrite.' These will be the sweet-smelling flowers in the garland that will be woven. Depend upon it, a Christian man who is bent on living out Christianity for himself, and on seeking to apply it around him, will have to fight and endure.

But all that is as nothing—nothing—to what the front rank had to go through, and went through, joyfully. They fell in the trenches and filled them up, that the rear rank might pass across. They bore sword stabs; we have only to bear pin pricks. Stones were flung at them, as at Stephen outside the wall; handfuls of mud are all that we have to be afraid of.

So, brethren, accept thankfully to-day's form of the permanent conflict, and see that you do unmurmuringly, cheerfully, and thoroughly the task that is laid upon you. And do not think much of the discomforts and annoyances. For us to speak about sacrifices for Christ is as if a bargeman on a canal were to dilate on the perils of his voyage in the hearing of an Arctic explorer; or as if a man that went in a first-class carriage to London were to speak to an African traveller about 'the perils of the road.' 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood. 'Consider Him'; and take up your cross, and follow Him.

A FATHER'S DISCIPLINE

'For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.'—HEB. xii. 10.

FEW words of Scripture have been oftener than these laid as a healing balm on wounded hearts. They may be long unnoticed on the page, like a lighthouse in calm sunshine, but sooner or later the stormy night falls, and then the bright beam flashes out and is welcome. They go very deep into the meaning of life as discipline; they tell us how much better God's discipline is than that of the most loving and wise of parents, and they give that superiority as a reason for our yielding more entire and cheerful obedience to Him than we do to such.

Now, to grasp the full meaning of these words, we have to notice that the earthly and the heavenly disciplines are described in four contrasted clauses, which are arranged in what students call inverted parallelism—that is to say, the first clause corresponds to the fourth and the second to the third. 'For a few days' pairs off with 'that we might be partakers of His holiness.' Now, at first sight that does not seem a contrast; but notice that the 'for' in the former clause is not the 'for' of duration, but of direction. It does not tell us the space during which the chastisement or discipline lasts, but the end towards which it is pointed. The earthly parent's discipline trains a boy or girl for circumstances, pursuits, occupations, professions, all of which terminate with the brief span of life. God's training is for an eternal day. It would be quite irrelevant to bring in here any reference to the length of time during which an earthly father's discipline lasts, but it is in full consonance with the writer's intention to dwell upon the limited scope of the one and the wide and eternal purpose of the other.

Then, as for the other contrast—'for their own pleasure,' or, as the Revised Version reads it, 'as seemed good to them'—'but He for our profit.' Elements of personal peculiarity, whim, passion, limited and possibly erroneous conceptions of what is the right thing to do for the child, enter into the training of the wisest and most loving amongst us; and we often make a mistake and do harm when we think we are doing good. But God's training is all from a simple and unerring regard to the benefit of His child. Thus the guiding principles of the two disciplines are contrasted in the two central clauses.

Now, these are very threadbare, commonplace, and old-fashioned thoughts; but, perhaps, they are so familiar that they have not their proper power over us; and I wish to try in this sermon, if I can, to get more into them, or to get them more into us, by one or two very plain remarks.

I. I would ask you to note, first, the grand, deep, general conception, here firmly laid hold of, of life as only intelligible when it is regarded as education or discipline.

God corrects, chastens, trains, educates. That is the deepest word about everything that befalls us. Now, there are involved in that two or three very obvious thoughts, which would make us all calmer and nobler and stronger, if they were vividly and vitally present to us day by day.

The first is that all which befalls us has a will behind it and is co-operant to an end. Life is not a heap of unconnected incidents, like a number of links flung down on the ground, but the links are a chain, and the chain has a staple. It is not a law without a law-giver that shapes men's lives. It is not a blind, impersonal chance that presides over it. Why, these very meteors that astronomers expect in autumn to be flying and flashing through the sky in apparent wild disorder, all obey law. Our lives, in like manner, are embodied thoughts of God's, in as far as the incidents which befall in them are concerned. We may mar, we may fight against, may contradict the presiding divine purpose; but yet, behind the wild dance of flashing and transitory lights that go careering all over the sky, there guides, not an impersonal Power, but a living, loving Will. *He*, not *it*; He, not *they*, men, circumstances, what people call second causes—*He* corrects, and He does it for a great purpose.

Ah! if we believed that, and not merely said it from the teeth outwards, but if it were a living conviction with us, do you not think our lives would tower up into a nobleness, and settle themselves down into a tranquillity all strange to them to-day?

But, then, further, there is the other thought to be grasped, that all our days we are here in a state of pupilage. The world is God's nursery. There are many mansions in the Father's house; and this earth is where He keeps the little ones. That is the true meaning of everything that befalls us. It is education. Work would not be worth doing if it were not. Life is given to us to teach us how to live, to exercise our powers, to give us habits and facilities of working. We are like boys in a training ship that lies for most of the time in harbour, and now and then goes out upon some short and easy cruise; not for the sake of getting anywhere in particular, but for the sake of exercising the lads in seamanship. There is no meaning worthy of us—to say nothing of God—in anything that we do, unless it is looked upon as schooling. We all say we believe that. Alas! I am afraid very many of us forget it.

But that conception of the meaning of each event that befalls us carries with it the conception of the whole of this life, as being an education towards another. I do not understand how any man can bear to live here, and to do all his painful work, unless he thinks that by it he is getting ready for the life beyond; and that 'nothing can bereave him of the force he made his own, being here.' The rough ore is turned into steel by being

'Plunged in baths of hissing tears,
And heated hot with hopes and fears,
And battered with the shocks of doom.'

And then—what then? Is an instrument, thus fashioned and tempered and polished, destined to be broken and 'thrown as rubbish to the void'? Certainly not. If this life is education, as is obvious upon its very face, then there *is* a place where we shall exercise the faculties that we have acquired here, and manifest in loftier forms the characters which here we have made our own.

Now, brethren, if we carry these thoughts with us habitually, what a difference it will make upon everything that befalls us! You hear men often maundering and murmuring about the mysteries of the pain and sorrow and suffering of this world, wondering if there is any loving Will behind it all. That perplexed questioning goes on the hypothesis that life is meant mainly for enjoyment or for material good. If we once apprehended in its all-applicable range this simple truth, that life is a discipline, we should have less difficulty in understanding what people call the mysteries of Providence. I do not say it would interpret everything, but it would interpret an immense deal. It would make us eager, as each event came, to find out its special mission and what it was meant to do for us. It would dignify trifles, and bring down the overwhelming magnitude of the so-called great events, and would make us lords of ourselves, and lords of circumstances, and ready to wring the last drop of possible advantage out of each thing that befell us. Life is a Father's discipline.

II. Note the guiding principle of that discipline.

'They . . . as seemed good to them.' I have already said that, even in the most wise and unselfish training by an earthly parent, there will mingle subjective elements, peculiarities of view and thought, and sometimes of passion and whim and other ingredients, which detract from the value of all such training. The guiding principle for each earthly parent, even at the best, can only be his conception of what is for the good of his child; and oftentimes that is not purely the guide by which the parent's discipline is directed. So the text turns us away from all these incompletenesses, and tells us, 'He for our profit'—with no sidelong look to anything else, and with an entirely wise knowledge of what is best for us, so that the result will be always and only for our good. This is the point of view from which every Christian man ought to look upon all that befalls him.

What follows? This, plainly: there is no such thing as evil except the evil of sin. All that comes is good—of various sorts and various complexions, but all generically the same. The inundation comes up over the fields, and men are in despair. It goes down; and then, like the slime left from the Nile in flood, there is better soil for the fertilising of our land. Storms keep sea and air from stagnating. All that men call evil in the material world has in it a soul of good.

That is an old, old commonplace; but, like the other one, of which I have been speaking, it is more often professed than realised, and we need to be brought back to the recognition of it more entirely than we ordinarily are. If it be that all my life is paternal discipline, and that God makes no mistakes, then I can embrace whatever comes to me, and be sure that in it I shall find that which will be for my good.

Ah, brethren, it is easy to say so when things go well; but, surely, when the night falls is the time for the stars to shine. That gracious word should shine upon some of us in to-day's perplexities, and pains, and disappointments, and sorrows—'He for our profit.'

Now, that great thought does not in the least deny the fact that pain and sorrow, and so-called evil, are very real. There is no false stoicism in Christianity. The mission of our troubles would not be effected unless they did trouble us. The good that we get from a sorrow would not be realised unless we did sorrow. 'Weep for yourselves,' said the Master, 'and for your children.' It is right that we should writhe in pain. It is right that we should yield to the impressions that are made upon us by calamities. But it is not right that we should be so affected as that we should fail to discern in them this gracious thought—'for our profit.' God sends us many love-tokens, and amongst them are the great and the little annoyances and pains that beset our lives, and on each of them, if we would look, we should see written, in His own hand, this inscription: 'For your good.' Do not let us have our eyes so full of tears that we cannot see, or our hearts so full of regrets that we cannot accept, that sweet, strong message.

The guiding principle of all that befalls us is God's unerring knowledge of what will do us good. That will not prevent, and is not meant to prevent, the arrow from wounding, but it does wipe the poison off the arrow, and diminish the pain, and should diminish the tears.

III. Lastly, here we see the great aim of all the discipline.

The earthly parent trains his son, or her daughter, for earthly occupations. These last a little while. God trains us for an eternal end: 'that we should be partakers of His holiness.' The one object which is congruous with a man's nature, and is stamped on his whole being, as its only adequate end, is that he should be like God. Holiness is the Scriptural shorthand expression for all that in the divine nature which separates God from, and lifts Him above, the creature; and in that aspect of the word the gulf can never be lessened nor bridged between us and Him. But it also is the expression for the moral purity and perfection of that divine nature which separates Him from the creatures far more really than do the metaphysical attributes that belong to His infinitude and eternity; and in that aspect the great hope that is given to us is that we may rise nearer and nearer to that perfect whiteness of purity, and though we cannot share in His essential, changeless being, may '*walk*'—as befits our limited and changeful natures—'in the light, as He'—as befits His boundless and eternal being—'*is* in the light.' That is the only end which it is worthy of a man, being what he is, to propose to himself as the issue of his earthly experience. If I fail in that, whatever else I have accomplished, I fail in everything. I may have made myself rich, cultured, learned, famous, refined, prosperous; but if I have not at least begun to be like God in purity, in will, in heart, then my whole career has missed the purpose for which I was made, and for which all the discipline of life has been lavished upon me. Fail there, and, wherever you succeed, you are a failure. Succeed there, and, wherever you fail, you are a success.

That great and only worthy end may be reached by the ministration of circumstances and the discipline through which God passes us. These are not the only ways by which He makes us partakers of His holiness, as we well know. There is the work of that Divine Spirit who is granted to every believer to breathe into him the holy breath of an immortal and incorruptible life. To work along with these there is the influence that is brought to bear upon us by the circumstances in which we are placed and the duties which we have to perform. These may all help us to be nearer and liker to God.

That is the intention of our sorrows. They will wean us; they will refine us; and they will blow us to His breast, as a strong wind might sweep a man into some refuge from itself. I am sure that among my hearers there are some who can thankfully attest that they were brought nearer to God by some short, sharp sorrow than by many long days of prosperity. What Absalom, in his wayward, impulsive way, did with Joab is like what God sometimes does with His sons. Joab would not come to Absalom's palace, so Absalom set his corn on fire; and then Joab came. So God sometimes burns our harvests that we may go to Him.

But the sorrow that is meant to bring us nearer to Him may be in vain. The same circumstances may produce opposite effects. I dare say there are people listening to me now who have been made hard, and sullen, and bitter, and paralysed for good work, because they have some heavy burden or some wound that life can never heal, to be carried or to ache. Ah brethren! we are often like shipwrecked crews, of whom some are driven by the danger to their knees, and some are driven to the spirit-casks. Take care that you do not waste your sorrows; that you do not let the precious gifts of disappointment, pain, loss, loneliness, ill-health, or similar afflictions that come into your daily life, mar you instead of mending you. See that they send you nearer to God, and not that they drive you farther from Him. See that they make you more anxious to have the durable riches and righteousness which no man can take from you, than to grasp at what may yet remain of fleeting earthly joys.

So, brethren, let us try to school ourselves into the habitual and operative conviction that life is discipline. Let us yield ourselves to the loving will of the unerring Father, the perfect love. Let us beware of getting no good from what is charged to the brim with good. And let us see to it that out of the many fleeting circumstances of life we gather and keep the eternal fruit of being partakers of His holiness. May it never have to be said of any of us that we wasted the mercies which were judgments too, and found no good in the things that our tortured hearts felt to be also evils, lest God should have to wail over any of us, 'In vain have I smitten your children; they have received no correction!'

ESAU'S VAIN TEARS

'For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.'—HEB. xii. 17.

THESE words have been often understood as teaching a very ghastly and terrible doctrine, viz., that a man may earnestly and tearfully desire to repent, and be unable to do so. Such teaching has burdened many a heart, and has put obstacles before many feeble feet in the way of a return to God. It seems to me to be contradicted by a thousand places of Scripture, and to involve something very much like a contradiction in terms.

The Revised Version, by a very slight change, has dispelled that ugly dream. It has put the clause 'for he found no place of repentance' in a parenthesis. The effect of that is to bring the first and last clauses of the verse more closely together; and to show more clearly that what Esau is represented as seeking, and seeking with tears in vain, is not repentance, but the Father's blessing.

It may not, perhaps, be legitimate, regard being had to the construction of the sentence, to treat the clause in question as a parenthesis, because it is so closely connected with the succeeding clause by the antithesis of 'found' in the one and 'sought' in the other. But although that may be so, I have no doubt whatever that the truth intended to be conveyed by the parenthesis of the Revised Version is the true interpretation of the words before us; and that we are to find here simply the declaration that this man, at a given time of his life, 'would have inherited the blessing,' 'sought it carefully with tears,' and found it not.

Now the words, thus understood, teach a sufficiently grave and solemn lesson, though they do not teach the ghastly, and, as I believe, the erroneous thought that has been drawn from them. And it may be worth our while to consider for a moment the lessons that they do teach, and to try to lay them upon our hearts.

I. I begin then, first, with asking you to look at the history which is held up before us here as a solemn warning.

The character of Esau is a very simple one. In many respects he is much more attractive and admirable than his brother Jacob. He is frank, generous, quick to kindle into anger, but, as the story shows us too, quick to forgive; placable, easily to be entreated; with the wild Arab virtues of chivalry and generosity and bravery; and the vices belonging to such a character, of almost utter incapacity to rise beyond the present, and of a great susceptibility to mere material and sensual gratification.

And so he comes in from the field hungry and faint. The pottage smells savoury there, as it smokes in the dish before him. The birthright is a long way off, very unsubstantial, very ideal, and the thing that is nearest him, though it be small, shuts out from his view the far greater thing that lies beyond. Therefore he elects to secure present gratification of a material character, whatever becomes of future satisfaction of a higher and more spiritual nature.

And are you going to throw stones at him for that? Is it such a very unusual thing to find men choosing paths that will yield some modicum of sufficiently hot and sufficiently savoury pottage, whatever becomes of their birthright? Is there nobody here that believes more in wealth than in purity? Is there no young man here who would rather live to make a fortune than to cultivate his own nature into loftiest beauty? Are there none of you that despise the priceless things, the things that have no price in the market because they are beyond all its wealth to purchase? Are there none of us who are such fools that a spoonful of pottage to-day seems to us to be more real and more precious than a whole heaven hereafter?

Esau had a show of reason. He said: 'I am ready to die, and what will my birthright do for me?' Better a thousand times that he, or we, should die as animals that we may live as the sons of God, than that we should buy existence at the price of true life. And so the man of our text is sufficiently like the rest of you, for you to have a fellow feeling to him that should make you wondrous kind, and his faults are nothing at all extraordinary, but only putting in graphic form, and in such disproportion as to be almost absurd, the choice that the mass of men always make between present and future, between the material and the spiritual. And then the story goes on to tell us that, long years afterwards, we do not know how long, he found out what a fool he had been. Perhaps so much as thirty or forty years elapsed between the moment when he despised his birthright and the other moment that is set before us here. What are the points that come out in the narrative to which our text refers? 'When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father' . . . and again, 'Hast thou but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.' These are the parts of the history which the writer of the Hebrews recalls to his Jewish hearers. There is nothing in them about Esau's vainly seeking for repentance, but there is an account of his passionate weeping and loud entreaties that he yet might obtain a blessing from Isaac's trembling lips. In the story there is no word of his vainly trying to repent, but there is a real repentance in the sense in which alone that word can be employed, in reference to such an incident and upon that plane of things, viz., there is in him a decided and fundamental change of view, of mind, as to the value of the birthright that he had despised, and that is repentance; and there is bitter sorrow for what had passed, and that is repentance; and there is earnest desire that it might be different, and that is a sign of repentance. There is no sign of sorrow for sin, of repentance, in that sense of the word, but if we take the word not in the religious meaning, but in what may be called its secular significance, there are in Esau's case, as recorded in Genesis, both the elements of a decided alteration of mind and purpose, and of penitence and sorrow for the past.

These, then, are the facts of the story, and these are the facts to which my text appeals, for it begins by saying, as to those to whom the whole narrative was familiar: 'Ye know how that.' Therefore all that follows must find its vindication in the story as it is written in Genesis.

II. These, then, being the facts, let me now come, in the second place, to deal with the lesson which this story teaches us.

Remember what I have said as to points which come out in the narrative, that the man there seeks with tears for the blessing, that so far from vainly seeking to repent, in the lower sense of the word which alone is appropriate in the present case, he does repent. Therefore that expression of our text 'he found no place of repentance' does not mean 'he found no place where he could repent,' but it means he found no field on which such repentance as he had could operate—so as to undo that which was past. His repentance did not alter the fixed destination of the blessing. His repentance, his change of mind as to the worth of the thing thrown away, and as to his own conduct in despising it, did not bring the thing back again to him. His tears did not obliterate what was done. He wished that it had been otherwise, but his wishes were vain.

And that is the lesson, my brethren, which this text as it stands is intended to teach us. We are pointed back to that tragic picture of Esau there, weeping, wringing his hands in the wild passion of his uncultured nature, when the blessing, seen to be desirable too late, had vanished from his convulsive grasp. And the lesson that is taught us is just this old solemn one. There may come in your life a time when the scales will fall from your eyes, and you will see how insignificant and miserable are the present gratifications for which you have sold your birthright, and may wish the bargain undone which cannot be undone. You cannot wash out bitter memories, you cannot blot out habits by a wish. Tears will not alter the irrevocable, you cannot avert consequences that fall upon a man, the consequences of a lifetime, by any weeping and wringing of your hands, and by any wish that they might disappear. 'What I have written I have written,' said Pilate, and in tragic sense it is true about many a man who at the end looks back upon many 'a line which dying he would wish to blot,' but which stands ineffaceable, not to be scratched out by any of your penknives, unless you can cut out the substance of the soul on which it is written.

My brother! learn the lesson. You young men and women, do you begin right, that there may not be in your career deeds or a set of the life which one day you may wake to see has been all madness and misery! Oh! it is an awful thing for men to stand looking back upon a past life which to them appears as the vale of Sodom, on the morning after the eruption, did to Abraham as he looked on it from Mamre, 'and lo! the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.' So foul with slime-pits of boiling bitumen, the indulged lusts of the flesh, and dark with curling smoke-wreaths which tell of infernal fires wasting the fields that might have waved fruitful with harvests, the dark remembrances and blighting habits of sin set on fire of hell, does many a man's life lie spread out to his gaze. How fain would he cancel the record, if he could! How fain would he forget and reverse the history! How fain would he bring back his early innocence of these lusts and crimes! In vain! in vain!

The past stands—'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' I know, thank God for the knowledge, I know that—as we shall have to say presently—any man, at any moment of his earthly career, may find, if he seeks for it, the mercy of the Lord which bringeth salvation, but I know too that the salvation which comes to a man who has all his life been giving himself up to earth, and limiting his views and moulding his character by the present and its contemptible objects, will not be as large, as full, as blessed in many an aspect, as the salvation which might have been his if at an early stage in his life, with his character still to mould, and his memory still unwritten with evil, he had turned himself to his God, and found peace in the blood of Jesus Christ. Maimed and marred in a thousand ways, having memories which burn and sting, having habits which it will be hard to fight against; with the marks of the gyves upon his wrists; and his eyes unaccustomed to the daylight, like the prisoner that came out of the Bastille after a lifetime of imprisonment there, and wanted to go back again because he could not bear freedom and sunshine; so many a man brought to God and saved yet so as by fire, near the end of his days, has to feel that it is not all the same whether a lifetime has been spent in the temple and priestly service, or in the foul haunts of vice and debauchery.

We shall always have as much of God as we can hold, and as much of salvation as we desire; but the tragical thing is that a life spent in living, Esau-like, for the world and for the present, lames our desires and limits our capacities, so that even if such a man afterwards become a Christian, it may be impossible even for the giving God to give us as large a bestowment of His mercy and grace as we might otherwise have possessed.

On the other side it is not to be forgotten 'the publicans and the harlots shall go into the Kingdom of God before you,' Pharisees and Sadducees. And there is such a thing as the deep repentance and the passionate trust with which a soul, all spattered and befouled with fleshly sins, may cleave to the Master that may overcome even these disabilities of which I have spoken. But in the main it remains true that even if Esau at the last gets a blessing, he bears away a less blessing than he might have done had his earlier life been different.

III. And now let me turn last of all to what I venture to consider the misapprehension which these words do not teach.

They do not teach that a man may desire to repent with tears and be unable to do so. That, it seems to me, is to assert a staring, stark contradiction, for if a man desire to repent he must have changed his views as to the conduct of which he desires to repent, and that change of view is the repentance which he desires. And if a man desires to repent there must be in him some measure of regret and sorrow for the conduct of which he desires to repent, considered as sin against God, and that is repentance.

Nor do the words teach, as it seems to me, the cognate thought which has sometimes been deduced from them, that a man may desire to receive the salvation of His soul from God, and may not receive it. To desire is to possess; to possess in the measure of the desire, and according to its reality. There is no such thing in the spiritual realm as a real longing unfulfilled. 'Whosoever will, let him come and take of the water of life freely.' And the awful pictures that have been drawn of men weeping because they could not repent, and of men with passionate tears imploring from the Father in heaven the blessing which does not come to them, are slanders upon God and misapprehensions of His gospel. That gospel proclaims that wheresoever and whosoever will ask shall receive, or rather that God has already given, and that nothing but obstinate determination not to possess prevents any man from being enriched with the fulness of God's salvation.

Only remember, dear brethren, it is possible for a man to wish vagrantly, with half his will, to wish in a languid fashion, to wish while he is not prepared to surrender what stands in the way of his wish being gratified. And such wishing as that never got salvation, and never will. There are plenty of people that would like to be saved as they understand it, and to be sure that they are so, who are not prepared to close with the terms of salvation. It is not wishing of that sort that I am talking about. Heaven may be had for the wishing, but it must be an honest wish, it must be out-and-out wishing, it must be wishing which actuates the life, it must be wishing which drives you to the Cross of Christ. And then, in the measure of the desire shall be the gift; and the larger the petition, the larger the benediction which comes fluttering down from heaven on to your head and into your heart.

We have all sold our birthright, but we have a Brother in whom we may win it back, the elder Brother of us prodigals, who, instead of grudging us the fatted calf and the festival welcome, Himself has died that they may be ours; and that no penitence may be unavailing, nor any longing be unsatisfied for ever more.

Whatever we are, whatever has been our past, however embruted in sensual vice, however entangled in material gains, we have but to turn ourselves to that gracious Lord our Brother, in whom the Father blesses us with all heavenly blessings, and we shall share in the birthright of His firstborn Son, 'being heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.'

WITH WHOM FAITH LIVES

'Ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, 23. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.'—HEB. xii. 22, 23.

THE magnificent passage of which these words are part sums up the contrast between Judaism and Christianity which this whole Epistle has been illustrating and enforcing. The writer takes the scene on Sinai as expressive of the genius of the former revelation, whose centre was a law which evoked the consciousness of sin, and kindled terror; and which was embodied in sensible and material symbols. Far other and better are the characteristics of the latter revelation. That excites no dread; is given from no flashing mountain with accompaniments of darkness and trumpet blasts and terrible words; and it brings us into contact with no mere material and therefore perishable symbols, but with realities none the less real because they are above sense, and not remote from us though they be.

For, says my text, 'Ye *are* come,' not 'Ye *shall* come.' The humblest life may be in touch with the grandest realities in the universe, and need not wait for death to draw aside the separating curtain in order to be in the presence of God and in the heavenly Jerusalem.

How are these things brought to us? By the revelation of God in Christ. How are we brought to them? By faith in that revelation. So every believing life, howsoever encompassed by flesh and sense, can thrust, as it were, a hand through the veil, and grasp the realities beyond. The scene described in the first words of my text may verily be the platform on which our lives are lived, howsoever in outward form they may be passed on this low earth; and the companions, which the second part of our text discloses, may verily be our companions, though we 'wander lonely as a cloud,' or seem to be surrounded by far less noble society. By faith we are come to the unseen realities which are come to us by the revelation of God in Christ. 'Ye *are* come unto Mount Zion.'

Now, looking generally at these words, they give us just two things—the scene and the companions of the Christian life. The remainder of the passage will occupy us on future occasions, but for the present I confine myself to the words which I have read. And I shall best deal with them, I think, if I simply follow that division into which they naturally fall, and ask you to note, first, where faith lives, and, second, with whom faith lives.

I. First, then, where faith lives.

'Ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' There are two points here which carry us back to the topography of the ancient sacred city. In the literal Jerusalem, Zion was the lofty Acropolis, at once fortress and site of the king's palace, and round it clustered the dwellings of the city.

The two symbols are thus closely connected, and present substantially the same idea, and perhaps it is pressing a figure too far to find a diversity of meaning in the separate parts of this closely connected whole. But still it seems to me that there is a substantial difference of aspect in the two clauses.

The first thought, therefore, that I would suggest to you is this, that the life of a man who has truly laid hold of Jesus Christ, and so is living by faith, is on its inward side—that is, in deepest reality—a life passed in the dwelling of the great King. All through this letter, the writer is recurring to the thought of access to God, unimpeded and continual, as being the great gift which Jesus Christ has brought to us. And here he gathers it into the noblest symbol. There, lifted high above all the humbler roofs, flash the golden pinnacles of the great palace in which God Himself dwells. And we, toiling and moiling down here, surrounded by squalid circumstances, and annoyed by many cares, and limited by many narrownesses which we often find to be painful, and fighting with many sorrows, and seeming to ourselves to be, sometimes, homeless wanderers in a wilderness, may yet ever more 'dwell in the house of the Lord, to behold His beauty and to inquire in His temple.'

The privilege has for its other side a duty; the duty has for its foundation a privilege. For if it be true that the real life of every believing soul is a life that never moves from the temple-palace where God is, and that its inmost secret and the spring of its vitality is communion with God, what shall we say of the sort of lives that most of us most often live? Is there any truth in such exalted metaphors as this in reference to us? Does it not sound far liker irony than truth to say of people whose days are so shuttlecocked about by trifling cares, and absorbed in fleeting objects, and wasted in the chase after perishable delights, that they 'are come unto Mount Zion,' and dwell in the presence of God? Is my 'life hid with Christ in God'? There is no possibility of Death being your usher, to introduce you into the house of God not made with hands, unless faith has introduced you into it even whilst you tarry here, and unless your habitual direction of heart and mind towards Him keeps you ever more at least a waiter at His threshold, if you do not pass beyond. 'I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord than dwell in the tents of wickedness.'

My brother! do we so knit ourselves to Him, by heartfelt acceptance of the good news of His loving proximity to us which Jesus Christ brings, as that indeed we have left earth and care and sin at the foot of the mount, with the asses and the servants, and have our faces set to the lofty sweetnesses of our 'Father's house'? 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house,' and no less blessed are they 'in whose hearts are the ways' that lead to it.

Then let me remind you how Zion contrasts with Sinai, and thus suggests the thought that a true Christian life, based upon faith, has a communion with God which is darkened by no dread, nor disturbed by consciousness of unforgiven sin. We have set against each other the terrors of that theophany on Mount Sinai, attendant on, or rather precedent to, the giving of the law—the mountain wrapped in smoke; in the heart of the wreathing blackness the flashing fire; from out of the midst of it the long-drawn trumpet blasts, the proclamation of the coming of the King; and then the voice which, divine as it was, froze the marrow of the hearers' bones, that they entreated that no words like these should any more fall on their trembling ears.

That is the one picture. The other shows us the mount where the King dwells, serene and peaceful, the clouds far below the horizon; the flashing fire changed into lambent light; the blast of the trumpet stilled; the dread voice changed into a voice 'that speaketh better things' than were heard amidst the granite cliffs of the wilderness.

And so in vivid, picturesque form the writer gathers up the one great contrast between the revelation of which the message was law and its highest result the consciousness of sin and the shrinking that ensued, and the other of which the inmost heart is love, and the issue the attraction of hearts by the magnetism of its grace. The old fable of a mountain of loadstone which drew ships at sea to its cliffs is true of this Mount Zion, which is exalted above the mountains that it may draw hearts tossing on the restless sea of life to the 'fair havens' beneath its sheltering height. There is no dread, though there is reverence, and no fear, though there is awe, in the approach of those who come through Jesus Christ, and live beneath the smile of their reconciled God and Father. 'Ye are come unto Mount Zion,' the dwelling-place of the living God, from whose lips there will steal into the ears and the hearts of those who keep near Him, gracious words of consolation, so thrilling, so soothing, so enlightening, so searching, so encouraging, that they which hear them shall say, 'Speak yet again, that I may be blessed.'

And then there is the other aspect of this scene where faith lives. 'Ye are come unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem.' I need not remind you of how much we hear in this Epistle in reference to that city. It is generally set forth as being yet to come, as being the object of seeking rather than of possession. But the fact is that there are two aspects of it. In one it is future, in the other it is present. The general idea to be attached to it is simply that of the order and social state of those who love and serve God. Here, in this part of my text, we have to deal with the city rather than with its inhabitants. They follow thereafter, but, so far as we can separate between the two, we have just this idea enforced in the words that I am now commenting upon—viz., that the lowliest life, knit, as it seems to be, by so many bonds to the perishable associations and affinities of earth, yet, if it be a life of faith in

Jesus Christ, has its true affinities and relationships beyond, and not here. 'We have our citizenship in heaven,' says the Apostle, 'from whence also we look for the Saviour.' And every Christian man and woman is therefore bound to two or three very plain duties.

If you are living by faith, you do not belong to this order in the midst of which you find yourself. See that you keep vivid the consciousness that you do not. Cultivate the sense of detachment from the present, of not being absorbed by, or belonging to, things which are not coeval with yourself, and from all of which you will have to pass. Cultivate the sense of having your true home beyond the seas; and look to it as emigrants and colonists in a far-off land do to the old country, as being *home.* Live by the laws of your own city, and not by those that run in the community in which you dwell. You are under another jurisdiction. The examples, the maxims of low earthly prudence, or even of a somewhat higher earthly morality, are not your laws. You are not bound to do as the people round about you do. 'I appeal unto Cæsar.' I take my orders from him. I send my despatches home, and report to headquarters, and if I get approbation thence, it does not matter what the people amongst whom I dwell think about me. Make your investments at home. The Jews invented banking and letters of credit in order that they might the more easily shift their wealth from one land to another as exigencies required. We are strangers where we are. Do not put your property into the country in which you live as an alien, and lock it up there; but remit, as you can do, to the land where you are going, and to which you belong. Home securities are a good deal better than foreign ones. 'Ye are come to the city of the living God.' 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth.'

II. And now let me turn to the other thought here—With whom does faith live?

I need not trouble you with merely expository remarks upon the diversity of arrangements which is possible in the second half of my text. Suffice it to say that just as the scene of the life of faith has been represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form as Mount Zion and the heavenly Jerusalem, so the companions of that life are also represented in a twofold and yet closely connected form.

A slight alteration in the punctuation and order of the words in our text brings out, as it seems to me, the writer's idea. Suppose you put a comma after 'innumerable company,' and substitute for that phrase the original Greek word, so reading 'and to *myriads*,' and then pause there. That is the general definition, on which follows the division of the 'myriads' into two parts; one of which is 'the general assembly of angels,' and the other is the 'Church of the firstborn which are written in heaven.' So then, of companions for us, in our lonely earthly life, there be two sorts, and as to both of them the condition of recognising and enjoying their society is the same—viz., the exercise of faith.

Now the word rendered 'general assembly' has a grander idea in it than that. It is the technical word employed in classic Greek for the festal meetings of a nation at their great games or other solemn occasions, and always carries in it the idea of joy as well as of society. And so here the writer would have us think of one part of that great city, the heavenly Jerusalem, as, if I may so say, the dwelling-place of a loftier race of creatures whose life is immortal and pure joy; and that we, even we, have some connection with them. In an earlier part of this letter we read that they are all 'ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them that shall be heirs of salvation.' But here the ministration is not referred to, simply the fact of union and communion.

I am not going to enter at any length upon that subject, concerning which we know but very little. But still it seems to me that our ordinary type of Christian belief loses a great deal because it gives so little heed to the numerous teachings of the New Testament in regard to the reality of the existence of such beings, and of the tie that unites them with lowly believers here. All the servants of the King are friends of one another. And howsoever many they may be, and howsoever high above us in present stature any may tower, and howsoever impossible it be for us to see the glancing and hear the winnowing of their silver wings, as they flash upon errands of obedience to Him, and rejoice to hearken to the voice of His word, there is joy in the true belief that the else waste places of the universe are filled with those who, in their loftiness, rejoice to bend to us, saying, 'I am thy fellow servant, and of them which worship God.'

Brethren, we have a better face brightening the unseen than any angel face. But just because Jesus Christ fills the unseen for us, in Him we are united to all those of whom He is the Lord, and He is Lord of men as well as angels. So if the eyes of our hearts are opened, we, too, may see 'the mountain full of chariots of fire and horses of fire round about' the believing soul. And we, too, may come to the joyful assembly of the angels, whose joy is all the more poignant and deep when they, the elder brethren, see the prodigals return.

But the second group of companions is probably the more important for us. 'Ye are come,' says the text, not only to the angelic beings that cluster round His throne in joyful harmony, but also 'to the Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.' And, seeing that the names are in heaven, that means, evidently, men who themselves are here upon earth.

I have not time to dwell upon the great ideas which are here contained in the designation of the community of believing souls; I only remind you that probably the word 'church' is not so much employed here in its distinct ecclesiastical sense (for there are no ecclesiastical phrases in the Epistle to the Hebrews), as with allusion to the assembly of the Israelites beneath Mount Sinai, the contrast with which colours the whole of the context. It means, therefore, in general, simply the assembly of the firstborn. Can there be more than one firstborn in a family? Yes! In this family there can, for it is a name here not pointing to a temporary order, but to dignity and prerogative. The firstborn had the right of inheritance; the firstborn was sanctified to the Lord; the firstborn, by his primogeniture, was destined in the old system to be priest and king. All Israel collectively was regarded as the firstborn of the Lord. We, if our hearts are knit to Him who is preeminently firstborn amongst many brethren, obtain, by virtue of our union with Him, the rights and privileges, the obligations and responsibilities, of the eldest sons of the family of God. We inherit; we ought to be sanctified. It is for us, as the 'first fruits of His creatures,' to bring other men to Him, that through the Church the world may reach its goal, and creation may become that which God intended it to be.

These firstborn have their names written in heaven—inscribed on the register of the great city. And to that great community, invisible like the other realities in my text, and not conterminous with any visible society such as the existing visible Church, all those belong and come who are knit together by faith in the one Lord.

So, dear friends, it is for us to realise, in the midst, perhaps, of loneliness, the tie that knits us to every heart that finds in Jesus Christ what we do. In times when we seem to stand in a minority; in times when we are tormented by uncongenial surroundings; when we are tempted by lower society; when we are disposed to say, 'I am alone, with none to lean upon,' it does us good to think that, not only are there angels in heaven who may have charge concerning us, but that, all over the world, there are scattered brethren whose existence is a comfort, though we have never clasped their hands.

Such, then, is the scene, and such is the society, in which we may all dwell. Christian men and women, do you make conscience of realising all this by faith, by contemplation, by direct endeavours to pierce beyond the surface and shows of things to the realities that are unseen? See to it that you avail yourself of all the power, the peace, the blessing which will be yours in the degree in which your faith makes these the home and companions of your lives.

How noble the lowest life may become, like some poor, rough sea-shell with a gnarled and dimly coloured exterior, tossed about in the surge of a stormy sea, or anchored to a rock, but when opened all iridescent with rainbow sheen within, and bearing a pearl of great price! So, to outward seeming, my life may be rough and solitary and inconspicuous and sad, but, in inner reality, it may have come to Mount Zion, the city of the living God, and have angels for its guardians, and all the firstborn for its brethren and companions.

FAITH'S ACCESS TO THE JUDGE, AND HIS ATTENDANTS

'Ye are come . . . to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect.'—HEB. xii. 23.

THE principle of arrangement in this grand section of this letter is obscure, and I am afraid that I cannot cast much, if any, light upon it. We might, at first sight, have expected that the two clauses of our present text should have been inverted, so as to bring all the constituent parts of 'the city of the living God' closely together—viz., 'the angels,' the members of the militant Church on earth, and those of the triumphant Church in heaven; and also to bring together 'God the Judge of all,' and 'Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant.' But the arrangement, as it stands in our text, may be compared profitably with that of the preceding verses, which we were considering in the last sermon. There, as here, the allusion to the immediate presence of God passed at once into the reference to the citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. And just as there Zion, the palace, was immediately connected with the city of the living God, so here the writer, harking back, as it were, to his original starting-point, no sooner names 'God the Judge' than he passes on to set before us 'the spirits of just men made perfect.' In the earlier clauses we have had the more general reference to the palace and the city around it. Here, if I may so say, we pass within the palace gates, and the writer tells us what we find there. This interweaving of the presence of God with that of the creatures that live in His love witnesses to the great truth that our God dwells in no isolated supremacy, but in the midst of a blessed society; and that the solitary souls who find their way into His presence have a welcome, not only from Him, but from all their brethren of His great family.

So the arrangement may not be so inexplicable as, at first sight, it strikes us as being, if it suggests to us the close and indissoluble connection between God Himself and all those who, in every place, whether the place above or the place beneath, call upon the name of Him who is both their God and ours. In dealing with these words, I have simply to consider these two ideas thus set before us.

I. Faith plants us at the very bar of God.

'Ye are come to God the Judge of all.' Now, it is to be observed that, more accurately, the words might be rendered, 'Ye are come to the God of all as Judge'; for the point which the writer wishes to bring out is not so much the general idea of the divine presence, as that presence considered under a specific aspect, and referring to one mode of His action—viz., the judicial. It is further to be noticed that the judgment which is here spoken about is not, as the very language, 'Ye *are* come to the Judge.'

implies, future, but present. The Old Testament, with continual reference to which this letter is saturated, has a great deal more to say about the present continuous judgment which God works all through the ages than about the final future judgment. And, in accordance, not only with the language of our text, which makes *coming* a present thing, but, in accordance also with the whole tone of the Old Testament, we should recognise here, not so much a reference to the final tribunal before which all mankind must stand (at which the Judge is characteristically represented in the New Testament as being, not God the Father, but Jesus Christ), as to the continual judgment, both in the sense of decision as to character and infliction of consequences, which is being exercised *now* by the God of all.

So, then, the first thought that I would suggest from this idea is, Here is a truth which it is the office of faith to realise continually in our daily lives. Your loving access to God, Christian men and women, has brought you right under the eye of the Judge, and, though there be no terror in our approach to that tribunal, there ought to be a wholesome awe as the permanent attitude of our spirits, the awe which is the very opposite of the cowering dread which hath torment. He would be a bold criminal who would commit crimes in the very judgment-hall and before the face of his judge. And that must be a very defective Christian faith which, like the so-called faith of many amongst us, goes through life and sins in entire oblivion of the fact that it stands in the very presence of the Judge of all the earth. Oh, if we could rend the veil as death will rend it, and see the things which are, as faith will help us to see them

—for it *thins*, if it does not tear, the envious curtain between—would it be possible that we should live the low, mean, selfish, earthly, sinful lives, devoured by anxieties, defaced by stains, depressed by trivial sorrows, which, alas! so many of us do live? 'Ye are come . . . unto God the Judge of all.' 'If ye call Him Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.'

Then, again, notice that this judgment of God is one which a Christian man should joyfully accept. 'The Lord will judge His people,' says one of the psalms. 'You only have I known of all the inhabitants of the earth; therefore will I punish you for your iniquities,' says one of the prophets. Such sayings represent this present judgment as inevitable. just because of the close connection into which true faith brings a man with his Father in heaven. Inevitable, and likewise most blessed and desirable, for in the thought are included all the methods by which, in providence, and by ministration of His truth and of His Spirit, God reveals to us our hidden meannesses; and delivers us sometimes, even by the consequences which accrue from them, from the burden and power of our sin.

So, then, the office of faith in regard to this continuous judgment which God is exercising upon us because He loves us is, first of all, to open our hearts to it by confession, by frank communion, by referring all our actions to Him to court that investigation. That judgment is no mere knowledge by cold omniscience, such as a heathen conception of the divine eye might make it to be; but just as a careful gardener will go over his rose-trees, and the more carefully the more precious they are in his sight, to pick from each nestling-place at the junction of the leaves with the stem the tiny insects that are sucking out the sap and destroying them, so God will search our hearts in order to pluck from these the crawling evils which, microscopic and tiny as they may be, will yet, in their multitude innumerable, be destructive of our spirits' lives.

It is a *gospel* when we say, 'The Lord will judge His people.' Therefore in many a psalm we have the writers spreading themselves out before God, and beseeching Him to come and search them, and try them, and sift them through His sieve, and know them altogether, in the sure confidence that wheresoever He beholds an evil He will be ready to cure it, and that whosoever spreadeth out his sin before God will be lightened of the burden of his sin.

This merciful judgment, which is, in fact, all directed to the perfecting and sanctifying of its subjects, reaches its end in the measure in which we register its decisions in our consciences. God writes His mind about us on them, and when they speak they are only speaking an echo of the sentence that has been pronounced from that loftier tribunal. Therefore, whosoever professeth himself to be a Christian and does anything, be it great or small, which his conscience rebukes when done, and prohibited before it was done, that man is despising the judgment of God, and bringing down upon himself the condemnation which follows despised judgment. 'If we should judge ourselves we should not be judged.' Reverence your consciences: they are the echo of the Judge's voice; peruse their records; they are the register of the Judge's sentence; and whensoever that inward voice speaks, bow before it and say, 'Lord! Thy servant heareth.'

And then, further, remember that this judgment is one that demands our thankful acceptance of the discipline which it puts in force. If we knew ourselves we should bless God for our sorrows. These are His special means of drawing His children away from their evil. 'When we are chastened, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.' Oh! there would be less impatience, less blank amazement when suffering comes to us, less vain and impotent regrets for vanished blessings, if we saw in all the dealings of our Father's hands the results of His judgment, and believed that it is better for us to be separated, though it be with violence and much bleeding of torn-away hearts, from our idols than that our idolatry should destroy us and mar them. 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' This judgment is not only the merciful separation of us from our sins, but it is also a judgment on our behalf.

The office of the early Jewish judges was not only the judicial one which we mean by the word, but was much wider, and some trace of that wider idea runs through almost all the Old Testament references to the divine judgment. It comes to mean, not merely a decision adverse or favourable, as the case may be, as to the moral character of its subjects, but it also substantially means pleading their cause, defending their right, intervening for them, and so in many a psalm you will find such petitions as this, 'Judge me, O Lord; for I am poor and needy. Plead my cause against them which rise up against me.' And the same conception of the Judge's office appears in one of our Lord's parables, familiar to us all, in which we are told that 'the Lord will judge His own elect though He bear long with them.'

Thus, another of the blessed thoughts that come out of this conception of our approach to 'the Judge of all' is that we may confidently commit our cause to Him, and leave our vindication in His hands. So, abstinence from self-assertion, from self-vindication, from vengeance or recompense, patience, courage, consolation, strength, all these virtues will be ours if we understand to whom we come by our faith, and can behold, on the throne of the universe, One who will plead our cause, and undertake for us whensoever we are burdened and oppressed.

II. Secondly, Faith carries us while living to the society of the living dead.

'The Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect.' Immediately on the thought of God arising in the writer's mind, there rises also the blessed thought of the blessed company in the centre of whom He lives and reigns. We can say little about that subject, and perhaps the less we say the more we shall understand, and the more deeply we shall feel. We get glimpses but no clear vision, as when a flock of birds turn in their rapid flight, and for a moment the sun glances on their white wings; and then, with another turn, they drift away, spots of blackness in the blue. So we see but for a moment as the light falls, and then lose the momentary glory, but we may at least reverently note the exalted words here.

'The spirits of . . . men made perfect.' That is to say, they dwell freed from the incubus and limitations, and absolved from the activities, of a bodily organisation. We cannot understand such a condition. To us it may seem to mean passivity or almost unconsciousness, but we know, as another New Testament writer has told us, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord; and that in some deep, and to us now undiscoverable, fashion, that which the corporeal frame does for men here, immersed in the material world, there the encircling Christ in whom they rest does for them. We know little more, but we have a glimpse of a land of deep peace in which repose is not passivity nor unconsciousness, any more than service is weariness. And there we have to leave it, knowing only this, that it is possible for a man to exist and to be, in a relative sense, perfected without a body.

Then, further, these spirits are 'perfect.'

The writer has said, at the close of the preceding chapter, that the ancient saints 'without us should not be made perfect.' And here he employs the same word with distant reference, as I suppose, to his previous declaration. From which I infer that that old thought is true, that Jesus Christ shot some rays of His victorious and all-reconciling power from His Cross into the regions of darkness, and brought thence those who had been waiting for His coming through many a long age. A great painter has left on the walls of a little cell in his Florentine convent a picture of the victorious Christ, white-robed and banner-bearing, breaking down the iron gates that shut in the dark, rocky cave; and flocking to Him, with outstretched hands of eager welcome, the whole long series from the first man downwards, hastening to rejoice in His light, and to participate in His redemption.

So the ancient Church was 'perfected' in Christ; but the words refer, not only to those Old Testament patriarchs and saints, but to all who, up to the time of the writer's composition of his letter, 'slept in Jesus.' They have reached their goal in Him. The end for which they were created has been attained. They are in the summer of their powers, and full-grown adults, whilst we here, the maturest and the wisest, the strongest and the holiest, are but as babes in Christ.

But yet that 'perfecting' does not exclude progress, continuous through all the ages; and especially it does not exclude one great step in advance which, as Scripture teaches us, will be taken when the resurrection of the body is granted. Corporeity is the perfecting humanity. Body, soul, and spirit, these make the full-summed man in all his powers. And so the souls beneath the altar, clothed in white, and rapt in felicity, do yet wait 'for the adoption, even the redemption of the body.'

Mark, further, that these spirits perfected would not have been perfected there unless they had been made just here. That is the first step, without which nothing in death has any tendency to ennoble or exalt men. If we are ever to come to the perfecting of the heavens, we must begin with the justifying that takes place on earth.

Let me point you to one other consideration, bearing not so much on the condition as on the place of these perfected spirits. It is very significant, as I tried to point out, that they should be closely associated in our text with 'God the Judge of all.' Is there any hint there that men who have been redeemed, who being unjust, have been made just, and have had experience of restoration and of the misery of departure, shall, in the ultimate order of things, stand nearer the throne than unfallen spirits, and teach angels? It is the 'just man made perfect,' and not the festal assembly of the angels, that are brought into connection here with 'the Judge of all.' Is there any hint that in some sense these perfected spirits are assessors of God in His great judgment? 'Ye shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel,' seems to point in that direction. But the ground is precarious, and I only point to the words in passing as possibly affording a foothold for a 'perhaps.'

But the more important consideration is the real unity between poor souls here who are knit to Jesus Christ, and the spirits of the just made perfect who stand so close to the judgment-seat.

Ah, brethren! we have to alter the meaning of the words 'present' and 'absent' when we come to speak of spiritual realities. The gross localised conceptions that are appropriate to material space, and to transitory time, have nothing to do with that higher religion. It is no mere piece of rhetoric or sentiment to say that where our treasure is, there are our hearts, and where our hearts are there are we.

Love has no localities. It knits together two between whom oceans wide roll; it knits together saints on earth and saints in heaven. To talk of place is irrelevant in reference to such a union; for if our love, our aims, our hopes be the same, we are together. And if they on the upper side, and we on the lower, grasp each the outstretched hand of the same God, then we are one in Him, and the same life will tingle through our earthly frames and through their perfected spirits. He is the centre of the great wheel whose spokes are light and blessedness; and all who stand around Him are brought into unity by their common relation to the centre.

Our sorrows would be less sorrowful, our loss less utter, if we truly believed that while apart we are still together. Our courage and our hope would rise if we came closer in loving contemplation and believing thought to the present blessedness of those once our fellow-travellers, who, weak as we, have entered into rest. Heaven itself would gain some touch of true attractiveness if we more clearly saw, and more thankfully felt, that there is 'the Judge of all,' and there also 'the spirit of just men made perfect.'

But howsoever great may be the encouragement, the consolation, the quieting that come from them, let us turn away our eyes from the surrounding and lower seats to fix them on the central throne. Let us ever realise that we are ever in our great Judge's eye. Let us spread out our hearts for His scrutiny and decision, for His discipline if need be. Let us commit to Him our cause, and, in the peace that comes therefrom, we may understand why it was that psalmists of old called upon earth to rejoice and the hills to be glad because He 'cometh to judge the earth, to judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth.'

THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT AND ITS SEAL

'Ye are come . . . to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.'—Heb. xii. 24.

In previous sermons on the preceding context, we have had frequent occasion to remark on the parallel and contrast between Sinai and Zion, as expressive of the difference between the genius of Judaism and

Christianity, which shapes the whole of this section. That contrast and parallel are most obvious at its beginning and here at its close.

In the beginning we had the mountain of the Law, swathed in darkness, lit by flashing flame, contrasted with the sunny slopes of Zion, palace-crowned, and the wild desert set in opposition to the city of peace that clustered round the foot of Zion's Mount. Here at the close we have the key-words of the old revelation laid hold of and applied to the new. Judaism was a covenant in the form of a law, of which the terms were these: 'Do, and thou shalt live!' The gospel is a covenant in the form of a promise, of which the tenor is 'Believe and live; live and do!' The ancient covenant had Moses for its mediator, passing between the mountain and the plain. The gospel has a better and a truer link of union between God and man than any mere man, however exalted, can be. The ancient system had its sprinkled blood, by which the men on whom it fell entered into the covenant, and were ceremonially sanctified. The new covenant has its blood. An awful voice rolled amongst the peaks of Sinai. That 'blood of sprinkling' speaks too. And then the writer blends with that allusion another, to the voice of the blood of the first martyr, every drop of which cried to God for retribution, and points to the blood of the more innocent Abel, every drop of which appeals to the Father's heart for pardon.

Now it may be said that thus to present Christian truth under the guise of the symbols of an ancient ceremonial and external system is a retrograde step. And some people, who think themselves very enlightened, tell us that the time is past for looking at

Christianity from such a point of view. One great man has let himself talk about 'Hebrew old clothes.' I am very much mistaken if these old clothes will not turn out to be something like the raiment that the Hebrews wore in the wilderness, 'which waxed not old for forty years,' and outlasted a great many suits that other people had cut for themselves. We have only to ponder upon these emblems until they become significant to us, in order to see that, instead of being antiquated and effete, they are throbbing with life, and fit as close to the needs of to-day as ever they did. They came with a special message, no doubt, to these men to whom this letter was first addressed, who were by descent and habit Hebrews, and saturated with the law. But their message is quite as much to you and me; and I desire now simply to bring out the large and permanent meanings which lie beneath them.

I. First, then, note that God's revelation to us is in the form of a covenant.

Now, of course, when we talk about a covenant or compact between two men, we mean a matter of bargaining on the terms of which both have been consulted, and which has assumed its final form after negotiations and perhaps compromise. But there are necessarily limitations to the transference of all human ideas to divine relations. One such limitation is expressed in the very language of the original. The word rendered 'covenant' suppresses the idea of conjunction, and emphasises that of appointment. By which we are to learn that the covenant which God makes with man is of His own settling and is not the result of mutual giving and taking; that men have nothing to do with the determining of these conditions;

that He Himself has made them, and that He is bound by them, not because we have arranged them with Him, but because He has announced them to us. With that limitation we can take the idea and apply it to the relation between God and us, established in the great message of the gospel.

For what is the notion that underlies the old-fashioned, and to some of you obsolete and unwelcome word? Why, simply this, it is a definite disclosure of God's purpose as affecting you and me, by which disclosure He is prepared to stand and to be bound. It is a revelation, but a revelation that obliges the Revealer to a certain course of conduct; or, if you would rather have a less theological word, it is a system of promise under which God mercifully has willed that we should live. And just as when a king gives forth a proclamation, he is bound by the fact that he gave it forth, so God, out of all the infinite possibilities of His action, condescends to tell us what His line is to be, and He will adhere to it. He lets us see the works of the clock, if I may so say, not wholly, but in so far as we are affected by His action.

What, then, are the terms of this covenant? We have them drawn out, first, in the words of Jeremiah, who apprehended, when he was dwelling in the midst of that eternal system, that it could not be a final system; and next, by the writer of this letter quoting the prophet, who, in the midst of the vanishing of that which could be shaken, saw emerging, like the fairy form of the fabled goddess out of the sea-foam, the vast and permanent outlines of a nobler system. The promises of the covenant are, then, full forgiveness as the foundation of all, and built upon that, a knowledge of God inwardly illuminating and making a man independent of external helps, though he may sometimes be grateful for them; then a mutual possession which is based upon these, whereby I, even I, can venture to say, God is mine, and, more wonderful still, I, even I, can venture to believe that He bends down from heaven and says: 'And thou, thou art Mine!' and then, as the result of all—named first, but coming last in the order of nature—the law of His commandment will be so written upon the heart that delight and duty are spelt with the same letters, and His will is our will. These are the elements, or you can gather them all up into one, namely, the promise of eternal *life*—based upon forgiveness, operating through the knowledge of God, and issuing in perfect conformity to His blessed will.

If these, then, be the articles of the paction, think for a moment of the blessedness that lies hived in this ancient, and to some of us musty, thought of a covenant of God's. It gives a basis for knowledge. Unless He audibly and articulately and verifiably utters His mind and will, I know not where men are to go to get it. Without an actual revelation from heaven, of other nature, of clearer contents, of more solid certitude than the revelations that may have been written upon the tablets of our hearts, over which we have too often scrawled the devil's message, and over and above the ambiguous articles that may be picked out and pieced together, from reflection upon providence and nature, we need something better and firmer, more comprehensively and more manifestly authoritative, before we are entitled to say, 'Behold! I *know* that God loves me, and that I may put my trust in Him.' Brethren! I for my part believe that between agnosticism on that side, and the full evangelical faith of the New Testament in a supernatural revelation on this side, all forms of so-called Christianity which shy at the idea of a supernatural revelation are destined to have the life squeezed out of them, and that what will be left will be the two logical positions; first, God, if there be a God, never spoke, and we do not know anything about Him; and, second, 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.' If there be a God at all, and if there be in Him any love and any righteousness, it is infinitely more reasonable to suppose that He should have spoken His mind and heart to men, and given them a covenant on which they can reckon, than that He has been from the beginning a dumb God, that never opened His mouth with a word of guidance or of sympathy for the sons of men. Believe that who may; I cannot believe in a pure theism, which has no place for a supernatural revelation.

And then, again, let me remind you how here is the one foothold, if I may so say, for confidence. If God hath not spoken there is nothing to reckon upon. There are perhapses, probabilities if you like, possibilities, but nothing beyond, and no man can build a faith on a peradventure. There must be solid ground on which to rest; and here is solid ground: 'I make a covenant with you.' 'God is not a man that He should lie, nor the Son of Man that He should repent.' And armed with that great thought that He has verily rent the darkness and spoken words which commit *Him* and assure *us*, we, even the weakest of us, may venture to go to Him, and plead with Him that He cannot and dare not alter the thing that has gone forth out of His mouth; and so, in deepest reverence, can approach Him and plead the necessity of a great *Must* under which He has placed Himself by His own word. God is faithful, the covenant-making and the covenant-keeping God.

II. Secondly, mark that Jesus Christ is the Executor of this covenant.

Moses, of course, was a go-between, in a mere external sense; from the mountain to the plain and from the plain to the mountain, he passed, and in either case simply carried a message bearing God's will to man or man's submission to God. But we have to dig far deeper into the idea than that of a mere outward messenger who carries what is entrusted to him, as an errand boy might, if we are to get the notion of Christ's relation to these great promises, which, massed together, are God's covenant with us. Observe that the emphasis is here laid on the manhood of the Lord. It is *Jesus* who is the 'Mediator of the covenant': and observe, too, that that idea passes into the wider notion of His place as the link uniting God and man. The depth of the thought is only reached when we recognise His divinity and His humanity. He is the ladder with its foot on earth and its top in heaven.

Because God dwells in Him, and the word became flesh, He is able to lay His hand upon both, and to bring God to man and man to God.

He brings God to man. If what I have been saying is at all true, that for all solid faith we must have an articulate declaration of the divine mind and heart, it seems to me to be equally irrefragable that for any such declaration of the divine heart and mind we must have a human vehicle. God speaks through men. It is His highest way of making Himself known to men. And Jesus Christ in His Manhood declares God to us. Not by the mere words which He speaks, as a teacher and a wise man, a religious genius and a saint, a philosopher and a poet, a moralist and a judge; but by these, and also by His life, by His emotions of pity and gentleness and patience, and by everything that He does and everything that He endures, He speaks to us of God.

Brethren, where shall a poor man rest his soul outside of the direct or indirect influences of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Why! the very men who reject Him to-day, on the plea that they have learnt a nobler conception of God than they can find in Christianity, owe their conception of Him to the gospel which they reject. Where else is there certitude solid enough to resist the pressure of sorrow and of sin; confidence enough to maintain faith in the face of difficulty and conscious evil and death; or energy enough in a creed to make religion an all-controlling influence and an all-gladdening stay except in Jesus Christ? I venture to say, nowhere! Nowhere beyond the limits to which either the river of the water of life has manifestly flowed; or some rills and rivulets from it have crept underground to give strange verdure to some far-off pasture; nowhere else is there found the confidence in the Father's heart which is the property of the Christian man, and the result of the Christian covenant. Jesus Christ brings God to man by the declaration of His nature incarnate in humanity.

And, on the other hand, He brings man to God: for He stands to each of us as our true Brother, and united to us by such close and real bonds as that all which He has been and done may be ours if we join ourselves to Him by faith. And He brings men to God, because in Him only do we find the drawings that incline wayward and wandering hearts to the Father. And He seals for us that great Covenant in His own person and work, in so far as what He in manhood has done has made it possible that such promises should be given to us. And, still further, He is the Mediator of the covenant, in so far as He Himself possesses in His humanity all the blessings which manhood is capable of deriving from the Father, and He has them all in order that He may give them all. There is the great reservoir from which all men may fill their tiny cups.

Men tell us that they want no Mediator between them and God. Ah, my brother! go down into your own hearts; try to understand what sin is; and then go up as near as you can to the dazzling white light, and try partially to conceive of what God's holiness is, and tell us, Do you think you, as you are, could walk in that light and not be consumed? It seems to me that no man who has any deep knowledge of his own heart, and any, though it be inadequate, yet true, conception of the divine nature, dare take upon his lips that boast that we often hear, 'We need none to come between us and God.'

For me, I thankfully hear Him say, 'No man cometh to the Father but by Me'; and pray for grace to tread in that only way that leadeth unto God.

III. Note the sprinkling of the blood which seals the covenant.

There is an allusion there, as I have already suggested, to the ceremonial at Sinai, when, in token of their entrance into the covenant, the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled upon the crowd; and also an allusion to the voice of the blood of the innocent Abel, which 'cried to God from the ground.' The writer has already referred to that in the earlier part of the letter; and here he weaves the two together because, with whatever differences of representation, the substantial meaning of both images is the same. The blood shed establishes the covenant; and the blood sprinkled brings us into it.

If Jesus had not died, there would have been no promises for us, beginning in forgiveness and ending in wills delighting in God's law. It is 'the new covenant in His blood.' The death of Christ is ever present to the divine mind and determines the divine action.

Hence the allusion to the voice, in contrast both to the dread voice that echoed among the grim peaks of Sinai, and to that which, as if each drop had a tongue, called from Abel's innocent blood for retribution. Christ's, too, has a voice, and that an all-powerful one. It cries for pardon with the same authority of intercession as we hear in His wondrous high-priestly prayer: 'Father, I will.'

Further, that sprinkling, which introduced technically and formally these people into that covenant, represents for us the personal application to ourselves of the power of His death and of His life by which we may make all God's promises our own, and be cleansed from all sin. It is 'sprinkled.' Then it is capable of division into indefinitely small portions, and of the closest contact with individuals. That is but a highly metaphorical way of saying that Jesus Christ has died for each of us, that each of us may find acceptance and cleansing, and the inheritance of all the promises, if we put our trust in Him.

For remember, these words of my text are the end of a great sentence, which begins, 'Ye are come.'

Faith is that coming. What did Christ say? 'He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger. He that believeth on Me shall never thirst.' There is His own interpretation of the metaphor. Whosoever trusts Him, comes to Him. If I put my tremulous faith on that dear Lord, though He be on the throne of the universe, and I down here, in this far-away dim corner of His creation, I am with Him where He is, and no film of distance need separate us. If we trust Him we come to Him. If we rest upon Him as our advocate and hope, then the loud voice of our sins will not be heard, accusing-tongued though they be, above the voice of His pleading blood.

And they who come to Christ, therein and thereby, come to all other glorious and precious persons and things in the universe. For, as I have already said, my text is the end of a long sentence, and is last named as being the foundation of all that precedes, and the condition of our finding ourselves in touch with all the other glories of which the writer has been speaking. He that comes to Christ is in the city. He that comes to Christ *is*—not *will be*—in the palace. He that comes to Christ is in the presence of the Judge. He that comes to Christ touches angels and perfected spirits, and is knit to all that are knit to the same Lord. He that comes to Christ comes to cleansing, and enters into the fulness of the promise, and lives in the presence and companionship of his present-absent Lord. If we come to Jesus by faith, Jesus will come at last to us to receive us to Himself; and join us to the choirs of the perfected spirits who 'have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'

REFUSING GOD'S VOICE

'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh: for if they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.'—HEB. xii. 25.

THE writer has finished his great contrast of Judaism and Christianity as typified by the mounts Sinai and Zion. But the scene at the former still haunts his imagination and shapes this solemn warning. The multitude gathered there had shrunk from the divine voice, and 'entreated that it might not be spoken to them any more.' So may we do, standing before the better mount of a better revelation. The parallel between the two congregations at the two mountains is still more obvious if we remark that the word translated in my text 'refuse' is the same as has just been employed in a previous verse, describing the conduct of the Israelites, where it is rendered 'entreated.' It may seem strange that after so joyous and triumphant an enumeration of the glorious persons and things with whom we are brought into contact by faith, there should come the jarring note of solemn warning which seems to bring back the terrors of the ancient law. But, alas! the glories and blessedness into which faith introduces us are no guarantees against its decay; and they who are 'come unto Mount Zion and the city of the living God,' may turn their backs upon all the splendour, and wander away into the gaunt desert.

I. So we have here, first of all, the solemn possibility of refusal.

Now, to gain the whole force and solemnity of this exhortation, it is very needful to remember that it is addressed to professing Christians, who have in so far exercised real faith, as that by it 'they *are* come to

Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God.' We are to keep that clear, or we lose the whole force and meaning of this exhortation before us, which is addressed distinctly, emphatically, and, in its true application, exclusively to Christian men—'See that *ye* refuse not Him that speaketh.'

Then, again, it is to be noted that the refusal here spoken about, and against which we professing Christians are thus solemnly warned, is not necessarily entire intellectual rejection of the gospel and its message. For the Israelites, who made the original 'refusal,' to which that against which we are warned is paralleled, recognised the voice that they would not listen to as being God's voice; and just because it was His voice, wanted to hear no more of it. And so, although we may permissibly extend the words before us to include more than is thereby originally meant, yet we must remember that the true and proper application of them is to the conduct of men who, recognising that God is speaking to them, do not want to hear anything more from Him. That is to say, this warning brings to us Christians the reminder that it is possible for us so to tamper with what we know to be the uttered will and expressed commandment of God, as that our conduct is tantamount to saying, 'Be silent, O Lord! and let me not hear Thee speak any more to me.' The reason for that refusal, which thus, in its deepest criminality and darkest sin, can only be made by men that recognise the voice to be God's, lies just here, 'they could not endure that which was commanded.' So, then, the sum of the whole thing is this, that it is possible for Christian people so to cherish wills and purposes which they know to be in diametrical and flagrant contradiction to the will and purpose of God, that obstinately they prefer to stick by their own desires, and, if it may be, to stifle the voice of God.

Then remember, too, that this refusal, which in reality is the rising up of the creature's will, tastes, inclinations, desires, against the manifest and recognised will of God, may, and as a matter of fact often does, go along with a great deal of lip reverence and unconsciously hypocritical worship. These men, from whom the writer is drawing his warning in the wilderness there, said, 'Do not let *Him* speak! We are willing to obey all that He has to command; only let it come to us through human lips, and not in these tremendous syllables that awe our spirits.' They thought themselves to be perfectly willing to keep the commandments when they were given, and all that they wanted was some little accommodation to human weakness in the selection of the medium by which the word was brought. So we may be wrenching ourselves away from the voice of God, because we uncomfortably feel that it is against our resolves, and all the while may never know that we are unwilling to obey His commandments. The unconscious refusal is the formidable and the fatal one.

It comes by reason, as I have said, fundamentally of the rising up of our own determinations and wishes against His commandments; but it is also due to other causes operating along with this. How can you hear God's voice if you are letting your own yelping dog-kennel of passions speak so loudly as they do? Will God's voice be heard in a heart that is all echoing with earthly wishes, loudly clamant for their gratification, or with sensual desires passionately demanding their food to be flung to them? Will God's voice be heard in a heart where the janglings of contending wishes and earthly inclinations are perpetually loud in their brawling? Will it be heard in a heart which has turned itself into a sounding-board for all the noises of the world and the voices of men? The voice of God is heard in silence, and not amidst the Babel of our own hearts. And they who, unconsciously, perhaps, of what they are doing, open their ears wide to hear what they themselves in the lower parts of their souls prescribe, or bow themselves in obedience to the precepts and maxims of men round them, are really refusing to hear the voice of God.

It is not to be forgotten, howsoever, that whilst thus the true and proper application of these words is to Christian men, and the way by which we refuse to listen to that awful utterance is by withdrawing our lives from the control of His will, and dragging away our contemplations from meditation upon His word, yet there is a further form in which men may refuse that voice, which eminently threatened the persons to whom this warning was first directed. All through this letter we see that the writer is in fear that his correspondents should fall away into intellectual and complete rejection of Christianity. And the reason was mainly this, that the fall of the ancient and sacred system of the old covenant might lead them to distrust all revelation from God, and to cast aside the gospel message. So the exhortation of my text assumes a special closeness of application to us whose lot has been cast in revolutionary times, as was theirs, and who have, in our measure, something of that same experience to go through which made the sharp trial of these Hebrew Christians. To them, solid and permanent as they had fancied them, ancient and God-appointed realities and ordinances were melting away; and it was natural that they should ask themselves, 'Is there anything that will not melt, on which we can rest?' And to us in this day much of the same sort of discipline is appointed; and we, too, have to see, both in the religious and in the social world, much evidently waxing old and ready to vanish away which our fathers thought to be permanent. And the question for us is, Is there anything that we can cling to? Yes! to the 'voice that speaks from heaven' in Jesus Christ. As long as that is sounding in our ears we can calmly look out on the evanescence of the evanescent, and confidently rely on the permanence of the permanent. And so, brother, though this, that, and the other of the externals of Christianity, in polity, in form, in mode, may be passing away, be sure of this, the solid core abides; and that core lies in the first word of this letter. 'God . . . hath spoken unto us in His Son.' See that no experience of mutation leads you to falter in your confidence in that voice, and 'see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh.'

II. Again, note the sleepless vigilance necessary to counteract the tendency to refusal.

'See that ye refuse not.' A warning finger is, as it were, lifted. Take heed against the tendencies that lie in yourself and the temptations around you. The consciousness of the possibility of the danger is half the battle. 'Blessed is the man that feareth always,' says the psalm. 'The confident'—by which is meant the presumptuous, and not the trustful—'goeth on and is punished.' The timid—by which I mean the self-distrustful—clings to God, because he knows his danger, and is safe. If we think that we are on the verge of falling, we are nearer standing than we ever are besides. To lay to heart the reality and the imminence and the gravity of the possibility that is disclosed here is an essential part of the means for preventing its becoming a reality. They who would say 'I cannot turn away because I have come,' have yet to learn the weakness of their own hearts and the strength of the world that draws them away. There is no security for us except in the continual temper of rooted self-distrust, for there is no motive that will drive us to the continual confidence in which alone is security but the persistent pressure of that sense that in ourselves we are nothing, and cannot but fall. I want no man to live in that selfish and anxious dread 'which hath torment,' but I am sure that the shortest road to the brave security which is certain of never being defeated is the clear and continual consciousness that

'In ourselves we nothing can,
Full soon were we down-ridden;
But for us fights the proper Man,
Whom God Himself hath bidden.'

The dark underside of the triumphant confidence, which on its sunny side looks up to heaven and receives its light, is that self-distrust which says always to ourselves, 'We have to take heed lest we refuse Him that speaketh.'

If there is any need to dwell upon specific methods by which this vigilance and continuous self-distrust may work out for us our security, one would say—by careful trying to reverse all these conditions which, as we have seen, lead us surely to the refusal. Silence the passions, the wishes, the voices of your own wills and tastes and inclinations and purposes. Bring them all into close touch with Him. Let there be no voice in your hearts till you know God's will; and then with a leap let your hearts be eager to do it. Keep yourselves out of the babble of the world's voices; and be accustomed to go by yourselves and let God speak. Nature seems to be silent to the busy traveller who never gets away from the thumping of the piston of the engine and the rattle of the wheels of the train. Let him go and sit down by himself on the mountain top, and the silence becomes all vocal and full of noises. Go into the lone place of silent contemplation, and so get near God, and you will hear His voice. But you will not hear it unless you still the beating of your own heart. Even in such busy lives as most of us have to live it is possible to secure some space for such solitary communion and meditation if we seriously feel that we must, and are ready to cut off needless distractions. He who thus has the habit of going alone with God will be able to hear His voice piercing through the importunate noises of earth, which drown it for others. Do promptly, precisely, perfectly, all that you know He *has* said. That is the way to sharpen your ears for the more delicate intonations of His voice, and the closer manifestations of His will. If you do not, the voice will hush itself into silence. Thus bringing your lives habitually into contact with God's word, and testing them all by it, you will not be in danger of 'refusing Him that speaketh.'

III. Lastly, note the solemn motives by which this sleepless vigilance is enforced.

'If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth'—or, perhaps, 'who on earth refused Him that spake'—'much more shall not we escape if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.' The clearness of the voice is the measure of the penalty of non-attention to it. The voice that spoke on earth had earthly penalties as the consequence of disobedience. The voice that speaks from heaven, by reason of its loftier majesty, and of the clearer utterances which are granted to us thereby, necessarily involves more severe and fatal issues from negligence to it.

Mark how the words of my text deepen and darken in their significance in the latter portion. In the first we had simply 'refusal,' or the desire not to hear the voice, and in the latter portion that has solidified and deepened itself into 'turning away from Him.' That is to say, when we once begin, as many professing Christians have begun, to be intolerant of God's voice meddling with their lives, we are upon an inclined plane, which, with a sharp pitch and a very short descent, carries us down to the darker condition of 'turning away from Him.' The man who stops his ears will very soon turn his back and be in flight, so far as he can, from the voice. Do not tamper with God's utterances. If you do, you have begun a course that ends in alienation from Him.

Then mark, again, the evils which fell upon these people who turned away from Him that speaketh on earth were their long wanderings in the wilderness, and their exclusion from the Land of Promise, and final deaths in the desert, where their bleaching bones lay white in the sunshine. And if you and I, dear friends, by continuous and increasing deafness to our Father's voice, have turned away from Him, then all that assemblage of flashing glories and majestic persons and of reconciling blood to which we come by faith, will melt away, 'and leave not a wrack behind.' We shall be like men who, in a dream, have thought themselves in a king's palace, surrounded by beauty and treasures, and awaken with a start and a shiver to find themselves alone in the desert. It will be loss enough if the fair city which hath foundations, and the palace-home of the king on the mountain, and the joyful assemblage of the angels, and the Church of the firstborn, and the spirits of the just made perfect, and the blood of sprinkling, all pass away from our vision, and instead of them there is nothing left but this mean, vulgar, fleeting world. They *will* pass if you do not listen to God, and *that* is why so many of you have so little conscious contact with the unseen and glorious realities to which faith gives access.

But then there are dark and real penalties to come in another life which the writer dimly shows to us. It is no part of my business to enlarge upon these solemn warnings. An inspired man may do it. I do not think that it is reverent for me to do it much. But at the same time, let me remind you that terror is a legitimate weapon to which to appeal, and unwelcome and unfashionable as its use is nowadays, it is one of the weapons in the armoury of the true preacher of God's Word. I believe we Christian ministers would do more if we were less chary of speaking out 'the terror of the Lord.' And though I shrink from anything like vulgar and rhetorical and sensational appeals to that side of divine revelation, and to what answers to it in us, I consider that I should be a traitor to the truth if I did not declare the fact that such appeals are legitimate, and that such terror is a part of the divine revelation.

So, dear friends, though I dare not dwell upon these, I dare not burke them. I remind you—and I do no more—of the tone that runs through all this letter, of which you have such instances as these, 'If the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression received its just recompense of reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?' and 'Of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall they be thought worthy who have counted the blood of the Covenant wherewith they were sanctified a common thing?' 'See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh,' for the clearer, the tenderer, the more stringent the beseechings of the love and the warnings of Christ's voice, the more solemn the consequences if we stop our ears to it. Better to hear it now, when it warns and pleads and beseeches and comforts and hallows and quickens, than to hear it first when it rends the tombs and shakes the earth, and summons all to judgment, and condemns some to the outer darkness to which they had first condemned themselves.

GOD'S VOICE AND MAN'S ECHO

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. 6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.'—HEB. xiii. 5, 6.

'HE hath said'; 'we may . . . say.' So, then, here are two voices; or, rather, a voice and an echo—God's voice of promises, and man's answering voice of confidence. God speaks to us that we may speak to Him; and when He speaks His promises, the only fitting answer is to accept them as true in all their fulness and individual application, and to build on them a fixed confidence.

The writer quotes two passages as from the Old Testament. The first of them is not found *verbatim* anywhere there; the nearest approach to it, and obviously the source of the quotation, occurs in a connection that is worth noting. When Moses was handing over the charge of his people to his successor, Joshua, he said first to the people and then to Joshua, 'Be strong and of good courage. . . . He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee.' The writer of the Epistle falls back upon these words with a slight alteration, and turns 'He' into 'I,' simply because he recognised that when Moses spoke, God was speaking through him, and countersigning with His own seal the promise which His servant made in His name. The other passage comes from the 118th Psalm. So, then, let us listen to the divine voice and the human answer.

I. God's voice of promise.

'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, notice that there is a distinct parallel between the position of the people to whom this Epistle was addressed, and that of the Hebrews to whom the original promise was made. The latter were standing on the verge of a great change. They were passing from under the leadership of Moses, and going under the leadership of the untried Joshua. Is it fanciful to recall that Joshua and Jesus are the same name; and that the difficulty which Israel on the borders of Canaan had to face, and the difficulty which these Hebrew Christians had to encounter, were similar, being in each case a change of leaders—the ceasing to look to Moses and the beginning to take commands from another? To men in such a crisis, when venerable authority was becoming antiquated, it might seem as if nothing was stable. Very appropriate, therefore, and strong was the encouragement given by pointing away from the flowing river to the Rock of Ages, rising changeless above the changing current of human life. So Moses said to his generation, and the author of the Epistle says after him to his contemporaries—you may change the leaders, but you keep the one Presence.

This letter goes on the principle throughout that everything which belonged to Israel, in the way of institutions, sacred persons, promises, is handed over to the Christian Church, and we are, as it were, served heirs to the whole of these. So, then, to every one of us the message comes, and comes in its most individual aspect, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.' Now, 'to leave' and 'to forsake' are identical, and the promise, if we keep to the Authorised Version, is a repetition, in the two clauses, of the same thought. But whilst the two clauses are substantially identical, there is a very beautiful variation in the form in which the one assurance is given in them. With regard to the first of them, 'I will never leave thee,' both in the Hebrew and in the Greek the word which is employed, and which is translated 'leave,' means the withdrawing of a hand that sustains. And so the Revised Version wisely substitutes for 'leave thee,' 'I will never fail thee.' We might even put it more colloquially, and approach more nearly the original expression, if we said, 'He will never drop thee'; never let His hand slacken, never withdraw its sustaining power, but will communicate for ever, day by day, not only the strength, but the conscious security that comes from feeling that great, strong, gentle hand, closing thee round and keeping thee tight. No man 'shall pluck them out of My father's hand.' 'The Lord upholdeth all that fall,' says one Psalm, and another of the psalmists puts it even more picturesquely; 'When I said my foot slippeth, Thy mercy, O Lord, held me up,' To say '*my* foot slippeth,' with a strong emphasis on the 'my,' is the sure way to be able to say the other thing: 'Thy mercy held me up.' 'He shall not fall, for the Lord is able to make him stand.' Suppose a man on some slippery glacier, not accustomed to ice-work, as he feels his foot going out from under him, he gets nervous, and nervousness means a fall, and a fall means disaster and sometimes death. So he grips the guide's hand, and then he can walk. There is Peter, out on the sea that he had presumptuously asked leave to walk on, and as he feels the cold water coming above his ankle, and sees it rising higher and higher, he begins to fear, and his fear makes him heavier, so that he sinks the faster, till the very extremity of need and paroxysm of terror strike out a spark of faith, and faith and fear are strangely blended in the cry: 'Lord, save me.' Christ's outstretched hand answered the cry, and its touch held Peter up, made him buoyant again, and as he rose, the water seemed to sink beneath his feet, and on that heaving pavement, glistening in the moonlight, he walked till he was helped into the boat again. So will God do for us, if we will, for He has said: 'I will never relax My grasp. Nothing shall ever come between My hand and thine.' When a nurse or a mother is holding a child's hand, her grip slackens unless it is perpetually repeated by fresh nervous tension. So all human helps tend to become less helpful, and all human love has its limits. But God's hand never slackens its grip, and we may be sure that, as He has grasped He will hold, and 'keep that which we have committed unto Him.'

But mark the other form of the promise. 'I will never drop thee'—that promises the communication of sustaining strength according to our need: 'nor forsake thee'—that is the same promise, in another shape. The tottering limbs need to be held up. The lonely heart walking the way of life, lonely after all companionship, and which has depths that the purest human love cannot sound, and sometimes dark secrets that it durst not admit the dearest to behold—that heart may have a divine companion. Here is a word for the solitary, and we are all solitary. Some of us, more plainly than others, are called upon to walk a lonely road in a great darkness, and to live lives little apprehended, little sympathised with, by others, or perchance having for our best companion, next to God, the memories of those who are beside us no more. Moses died, Joshua took his place; but behind the dying Moses—buried in his unknown grave, and left far away as the files crossed the Jordan—and behind the living Joshua, there was the Lord who liveth for ever. 'I will not forsake thee.' Dear ones go, and take half our hearts with them. People misunderstand us. We feel that we dare not open out our whole selves to any. We feel that, just as scientists tell us that no two atoms of the most solid body are in actual juxtaposition, but that there is a film of air between them, and hence all bodies are more or less elastic, if sufficient pressure be applied, so after the closest companionship there is a film. But that film makes no separation between us and God. 'I will not drop thee'

—there is the strength according to our need. 'I will not forsake thee,' there is companionship in all our solitude.

But do not let us forget that all God's promises have conditions appended, and that this one has its conditions like all the rest. Was not the history of Israel a contradiction of that glowing promise which was given them before they crossed the Jordan? Does the Jew to-day look as if he belonged to a nation that God would never leave nor forsake? Certainly not. And why? Simply because God's promise of not dropping us, and of never leaving us, is contingent upon our not dropping Him, and of our never leaving Him. 'No man shall pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No; but they can wriggle themselves out of their Father's hand. They can break the communion; they can separate themselves, and bring a film, not of impalpable and pure atmosphere, but of poisonous gases, between themselves and God. And God who, according to the grand old legend, before the Roman soldier flung his torch into the Holy of Holies, and 'burnt up the beautiful house where our fathers praised Him with fire,' was heard saying, 'Let us depart hence,' does say sometimes, when a man has gone away from Him, 'I will go and return to My place until they seek Me. In their affliction, they will seek Me early.'

And now let me say a word about the second voice that sounds here.

II. **The human answer, or the echo of the divine voice.**

If God speaks to me, He waits for me to speak to Him. My answer should be immediate, and my answer should embrace as true all that He has said to me, and my answer should build upon His great faithful promise a great triumphant confidence. Do we speak to God in the strain in which He speaks to us? When He says, 'I will,' do our hearts leap up with joyful confidence, and answer, 'Thou dost'? Do we take all His promises for our trust, or do we meet His firm assurance with a feeble, faltering faith? We turn God's 'verily' into a peradventure, often, and at best when He says to us 'I will,' we doubtingly say 'perhaps He may.' That is the kind of faith, even at its highest, with which the best of us meet this great promise, building frail tabernacles on the Rock of Ages and putting shame on God's faithfulness by our faithlessness. 'He hath said,' and then He pauses and listens, whether we are going to say anything in answer, and whether when He promises: 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' we are bold to say, 'The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man can do unto me.'

Now, I do not suppose that I am keeping too slavishly to the mere words of the text if I ask you to look at the beautiful sequence of thought in these three clauses which make the response of the man to the divine promise. There is a kind of throb of wonder in that word. 'The Lord is my helper.' That is the answer of faith to the divine promise, grasping it, never hesitating about it, laying it upon the heart, or on the fevered forehead like a cooling leaf, to subdue the hot pulsations there. And then what comes next? 'I will not fear.' We have the power of controlling our apprehension of peril, but it is of no use to screw ourselves up to a fictitious courage which consists mainly in the ostrich's wisdom of hiding its head from the danger, and in saying, 'Who is afraid?' Unless we can say 'The Lord is my helper,' it is folly to say, 'I will not be afraid, I will brace myself up, and be courageous to meet these difficulties.' That is all right, but it is *not* all right, unless we have laid the right foundation for courage. Having our purged ears opened to hear the great, strong, sweet divine promise, we are able to coerce our terrors, and to banish them from our minds by the assurance that, whatever comes, God is with us. 'The Lord is my helper'—that is the foundation, and built upon that—and madness unless it is built upon it—is the courage which says to all my fears, 'Down, down, you are not to get the mastery over me.' 'I will trust,' says the Psalmist, 'and not be afraid.' Faith is the antagonist to fear, because faith grasps the fact of the divine promise.

Now, there is another thought which may come in here since it is suggested by the context. and that is that the recognition of God thus, as always with us to sustain us, makes all earthly conditions tolerable. The whole of my text is given as the ground of the exhortation: 'Be content with such things as ye have,' for He hath said, 'I will never leave thee.' If Thou dost not leave me, then such things as I have are enough for me, and if Thou hast gone away, no things that I merely have are of much good to me.

And then comes the last stage in our answer to what God says, which is better represented by a slight variation in translation, putting the last words of my text as a question: 'What can man do unto me?' It is safe to look at men and things, and their possibly calamitous action upon our outward lives, when we have done the other two things, grasped God and rested in faith on Him. If we begin with what ought to come last, and look first at what man can do unto us, then fear will surge over us, as it ought to do. But if we follow the order of faith, and start with God's promise, grapple that to our heart, and put down with strong hand the craven dread that coils round our hearts, then we can look out with calm eyes upon all the appearances that may threaten evil, and say, 'Come on, come all, my foot is on the Rock of Ages, and my back is against it. No man can touch me.' So we may boldly say, 'What can man do unto me?'

THE UNCHANGING CHRIST

'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.
HEB. xiii. 8.

How far back does this 'yesterday' go? The limit must be found by observing that it is 'Jesus Christ' who is spoken of—that is to say, the *Incarnate* Saviour. That observation disposes of the reference of these words to the past eternity in which the eternal Word of God was what He is to-day. The sameness that is referred to here is neither the sameness of the divine Son from all eternity, nor the sameness of the medium of revelation in both the old and the new dispensations, but the sameness of the *human* Christ to all generations of His followers. And the epoch referred to in the 'yesterday' is defined more closely if we observe the previous context, which speaks of the dying teachers who have had the rule and have passed away. The 'yesterday' is the period of these departed teachers; the 'to-day' is the period of the writer and his readers.

But whilst the words of my text are thus narrowly limited, the attribute, which is predicated of Christ in them, is something more than belongs to manhood.

and requires for its foundation the assumption of His deity. He is the unchanging Jesus because He is the divine Son. The text resumes at the end of the Epistle, the solemn words of the first chapter, which referred the declaration of the Psalmist to 'the Son'—'Thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.' That Son, changeless and eternal by divine immutability, is Jesus Christ, the incarnate Redeemer.

This text may well be taken as our motto in looking forward, as I suppose we are all of us more or less doing, and trying to forecast the dim outlines of the coming events of this New Year. Whatever may happen, let us hold fast by that confidence, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

I. I apply these words, then, as a New-Year's motto in two or three different directions, and ask you to consider, first, the unchanging Christ in His relation to our changeful lives.

The one thing of which anticipation may be sure is that nothing continues in one stay. True, 'that which is to be hath already been'; true, there is 'nothing new under the sun'; but just as in the physical world the infinite variety of creatures and things is all made out of a few very simple elements, so, in our lives, out of a comparatively small number of possible incidents, an immense variety of combinations results, with the effect that, while we may be sure of the broad outlines of our future, we are all in the dark as to its particular events, and only know that ceaseless change will characterise it. So all forward looking must have a touch of fear in it, and there is only one thing that will enable us to front the else intolerable certainty of uncertainty, and that is, to fall back upon this thought of my text, 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

The one lesson of our changeful lives ought to be for each of us the existence of that which changes not. By the very law of contrast, and by the need of finding sufficient reason for the changes, we are driven from the contemplation of the fleeting to the vision of the permanent. The waves of this stormy sea of life ought to fling us all high and dry on the safe shore. Blessed are they who, in a world of passing phenomena, penetrate to the still centre of rest, and looking over all the vacillations of the things that can be shaken, can turn to the Christ and say, Thou who movest all things art Thyself unmoved; Thou who changest all things, Thyself changest not. As the moon rises slow and silvery, with its broad shield, out of the fluctuations of the ocean, so the one radiant Figure of the all-sufficient and immutable Lover and Friend of our souls should rise for us out of the billows of life's tossing ocean, and come to us across the seas. Brother! let the fleeting proclaim to you the permanent; let the world with its revolutions lead you up to the thought of Him who is the same for ever. For that is the only thought on which a man can build, and, building, be at rest.

The yesterday of my text may either be applied to the generations that have passed, and then the 'to-day' is our little life; or may be applied to my own yesterday, and then the to-day is this narrow present. In either application the words of my text are full of hope and of joy. In the former they say to us that no time can waste, nor any drawing from the fountain can diminish the all-sufficiency of that divine Christ in whom eighteen centuries have trusted and been 'lightened, and their faces were not ashamed.' The yesterday of His grace to past generations is the prophecy of the future and the law for the present. There is nothing that any past epoch has ever drawn from Him, of courage and confidence, of hope and wisdom, of guidance and strength, of love and consolation, of righteousness and purity, of brave hope and patient endurance, which He does not stand by my side ready to give to me too to-day, 'As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts,' and the old Christ of a thousand years ago is the Christ of to-day, ready to help, to succour, and to make us like Himself.

In the second reference, narrowing the 'yesterdays' to our own experiences, the words are full of consolation and of hope. 'Thou hast been my Help; leave me not, neither forsake me,' is the prayer that ought to be taught us by every remembrance of what Jesus Christ has been to us. The high-water mark of His possible sweetness does not lie in some irrevocable past moment of our lives. We never have to say that we have found a sufficiency in Him which we never shall find any more. Remember the time in your experience when Jesus Christ was most tender, most near, most sweet, most mysterious, most soul-sufficing for you, and be sure that He stands beside you, ready to renew the ancient blessing and to surpass it in His gift. Man's love sometimes wearies, Christ's never; man's basket may be emptied, Christ's is fuller after the distribution than it was before. This fountain can never run dry. Not until seven times, but until seventy times seven—perfection multiplied into perfection, and that again multiplied by perfection once more—is the limit of the inexhaustible mercy of our

Lord, and all in which the past has been rich lives in the present.

Remember, too, that this same thought which heartens us to front the inevitable changes, also gives dignity, beauty, poetry, to the small prosaic present. 'Jesus Christ is the same *to-day.*' We are always tempted to think that this moment is commonplace and insignificant. Yesterday lies consecrated in memory; to-morrow, radiant in hope; but to-day is poverty-stricken and prose. The sky is farthest away from us right over our heads; behind and in front it seems to touch the earth. But if we will only realise that all that sparkling lustre and all that more than mortal tenderness of pity and of love with which Jesus Christ has irradiated and sweetened any past is verily here with us amidst the commonplaces and insignificant duties of the dusty to-day, then we need look back to no purple distance, nor forward to any horizon where sky and earth kiss, but feel that here or nowhere, now or never, is Christ the all-sufficient and unchanging Friend. He is faithful. He cannot deny Himself.

II. So, secondly, I apply these words in another direction. I ask you to think of the relation between the unchanging Christ and the dying helpers.

That is the connection in which the words occur in my text. The writer has been speaking of the subordinate and delegated leaders and rulers in the Church 'who have spoken the word of God' and who have passed away, leaving a faith to be followed, and a conversation the end of which is to be considered. And, turning from all these mortal companions, helpers, guides, he bids us think of Him who liveth for ever, and for ever is the teacher, the companion, the home of our hearts, and the goal of our love. All other ties—sweet, tender, infinitely precious, have been or will be broken for you and me. Some of us have to look back upon their snapping; some of us have to look forward. But there is one bond over which the skeleton fingers of Death have no power, and they fumble at that knot in vain. He separates us from all others; blessed be God! he cannot separate us from Christ. 'I shall not lose Thee though I die'; and Thou, Thou diest never.

God's changeful providence comes into all our lives, and parts dear ones, making their places empty, that Christ Himself may fill the empty places, and, striking away other props, though the tendrils that twine round them bleed with the wrench, in order that the plant may no longer trail along the ground, but twine itself round the Cross and climb to the Christ upon the throne. 'In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne.' The true King was manifested when the earthly, shadowy monarch was swept away. And just as, on the face of some great wooded cliff, when the leaves drop the solemn strength of the everlasting rock gleams out pure, so when our dear ones fall away, Jesus Christ is revealed, 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.' 'They truly were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death.' 'This Man continueth ever.' He lives, and in Him all loves and companionships live unchanged.

III. So, further, we apply, in the third place, this thought to the relation between the unchanging Christ and decaying institutions and opinions.

The era in which this Epistle was written was an era of revolution so great that we can scarcely imagine its apparent magnitude. It was close upon the final destruction of the ancient system of Judaism as an external institution. The temple was tottering to its fall, the nation was ready to be scattered, and the writer, speaking to Hebrews, to whom that crash seemed to be the passing away of the eternal verities of God, bids them lift their eyes above all the chaos and dust of dissolving institutions and behold the true Eternal, the ever-living Christ. He warns them in the verse that follows my text not to be carried about with divers and strange doctrines, but to keep fast to the unchanging Jesus. And so these words may well come to us with lessons of encouragement, and with teaching of duty and steadfastness, in an epoch of much unrest and change—social, theological, ecclesiastical—such as that in which our lot is cast. Man's systems are the shadows on the hillside. Christ is the everlasting solemn mountain itself. Much in the popular conception and representation of Christianity is in the act of passing. Let it go; Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. We need not fear change within the limits of His Church or of His world. For change there means progress, and the more the human creations and embodiments of Christian truth crumble and disintegrate, the more distinctly does the solemn, single, unique figure of Christ the Same, rise before us. There is nothing in the world's history to compare with the phenomenon which is presented by the unworn freshness of Jesus Christ after all these centuries. All other men, however burning and shining their light, flicker and die out into extinction, and but for a season can the world rejoice in any of their beams; but this Jesus dominates the ages, and is as fresh to-day, in spite of all that men say, as He was eighteen centuries ago. They tell us He is losing His power; they tell us that mists of oblivion are wrapping Him round, as He moves slowly to the doom which besets Him in common with all the great names of the world. The wish is father to the thought. Christ is not done with yet, nor has the world done with Him, nor is He less available for the necessities of this generation, with its perplexities and difficulties, than He was in the past. His sameness is consistent with an infinite unfolding of new preciousness and new powers, as new generations with new questions arise, and the world seeks for fresh guidance. 'I write no new commandment unto you'; I preach no new Christ unto you, 'again, a new commandment I write unto you,' and every generation will find new impulse, new teaching, new shaping energies, social and individual, ecclesiastical, theological, intellectual, in the old Christ who was crucified for our offences and raised again for our justification, and remains 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

IV. Lastly, look at these words in their application to the relation between the unchanging Christ and the eternal life of heaven.

The 'for ever' of my text is not to be limited to this present life, but it runs on into the remotest future, and summons up before us the grand and boundless prospect of an eternal unfolding and reception of new beauties in the old earthly Christ. For Him the change between the 'to-day' of His earthly life and the 'for ever' of His ascended glory made no change in the tenderness of His heart, the sweetness of His smile, the nearness of His helping hand. The beloved apostle, when he saw Him for the first time after He was ascended, fell at His feet as dead, because the attributes of His nature had become so glorious. But when the old hand, the same hand that had been pierced with the nails on the Cross, though it now held the seven stars, was laid upon him, and the old voice, the same voice that had spoken to him in the upper room, and in feebleness from the Cross, though it was now as the 'sound of many waters,' said to him, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last; I am He that liveth and was dead and am alive for ever more'; John learned that the change from the Cross to the throne touched but the circumference of his Master's being, and left the whole centre of His love and brotherhood wholly unaffected.

Nor will the change for us, from earth to the close communion of the heavens, bring us into contact with a changed Christ. It will be but like the experience of a man starting from the outermost verge of the solar system, where that giant planet welters, away out in the darkness and the cold, and travelling inwards ever nearer and nearer to the central light, the warmth becoming more fervent, the radiance becoming more wondrous, as he draws closer and closer to the greatness which he divined when he was far away, and which he knows better when he is beside it. It will be the same Christ, the Mediator, the Revealer in heaven, whom we here dimly saw and knew to be the Sun of our souls through the clouds and mists of earth. That radiant and eternal sameness will consist with continual variety, and an endless streaming forth of new lustres and new powers. But through all the growing proximity and illumination of the heavens He will be the same Jesus that we knew upon earth; still the Friend and the Lover of our souls.

So, dear friends, if you and I have Him for our very own, then we do not need to fear change, for change will be progress; nor loss, for loss will be gain; nor the storm of life, which will drive us to His breast; nor the solitude of death, for our Shepherd will be with us there. He will be 'the same for ever'; though we shall know Him more deeply; even as we shall be the same, though 'changed from glory into glory.' If we have Him, we may be sure, on earth, of a 'to-morrow,' which 'shall be as this day, and much more abundant.' If we have Him, we may be sure of a heaven in which the sunny hours of its unending day will be filled with fruition and ever new glories from the old Christ who, for earth and heaven, is 'the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

AN ESTABLISHED HEART

. . . It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.'—HEB. xiii. 9.

THIS saying immediately follows the exhortation with which it is contrasted: 'Be not carried away with divers and strange doctrines.' Now, it is quite clear that the unsettlement and moving past some fixed point which are suggested in the word 'carried away' are contrasted with the fixedness which is implied in the main word of our text. They who are established, 'rooted and grounded,' are not apt to be swept away by the blasts of 'divers and strange doctrines.' But there is another contrast besides this, and that is the one which exists between doctrines and grace; and there is a still further subsequent contrast in the words that follow my text, 'It is a good

thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats.

Now I need not trouble you with the question as to what was the original reference of either of these two expressions, 'doctrines' and 'meats,' or whether they both point to some one form of teaching. What I rather want to emphasise here, in a sentence, is how, in these three principal words of three successive clauses, we get three aspects of the religious life—two of them spurious and partial, one of them sufficing and complete—'teachings'; 'grace'; 'meats.' Turned into modern English, the writer's meaning is that the merely intellectual religion, which is always occupied with propositions instead of with Jesus Christ, 'Who is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever,' is worthless, and the merely ceremonial religion, which is always occupied with casuistries about questions of meats, or external observance of any sort, is as valueless. There is no fixity; there is no rest of soul, no steadfastness of character to be found in either of these two directions. The only thing that ballasts and fills and calms the heart is what the writer here calls 'grace,' that is to say, the living personal experience of the love of God bestowed upon me and dwelling in my heart. You may have doctrines chattered to all eternity, and you may be so occupied about the externals of religion as that you never come near its centre, and its centre is that great thing which is here called 'grace,' which alone has power to establish the man's heart.

So, then, the main theme of these words is the possible stability of a fluctuating human life, the means of securing it, and the glory and beauty of the character which has secured it. Let us turn to these thoughts for a moment

I. First, then, mark what this writer conceives to be the one source of human stability.

'It is a good thing that the heart be established with grace.' Now I have a strong suspicion that a great deal of preaching goes over the heads of the hearers, because preachers have not gauged the ignorance of their auditory, and that, howsoever familiar to the ear the key-words of Christian revelation may be, it by no means follows that there is any definite and clear idea attached to these. So I do not think that it will be a waste of time for just a minute or two to try and put, as plainly as I can, what the New Testament means by this familiar and frequently reiterated word 'grace,' which, I suspect, is oftener pronounced than it is understood by a great many people.

To begin with, then, the root meaning of that word, which runs all through the New Testament, is simply favour, benignity, kindness, or to put all into a better and simpler form, the active love of God. Now, if we look at the various uses of the expression we find, for instance, that it is contrasted with a number of other things. Sometimes it is set in opposition to sin—sin reigns to righteousness, grace reigns to life. Sometimes it is contrasted with 'debt,' and sometimes put in opposition to 'works,' as, for instance, by Paul when he says, 'If it be of works then is it no more grace.' Sometimes it is opposed to law, as in the same apostle's words, 'Ye are not under law, but under grace.' Now, if we keep these various uses and contrasts in view we just come to this thought, that that active love of God is conditioned, not by any merit on our part—bubbles up from the depths of His own infinite heart, not because of what we are, but because of what He is, transcends all the rigid retributions of law, is not turned away by any sin, but continues to flood the world, simply because it wells up from the infinite and changeless fountain of love in the heart of God.

And then, from this central, deepest meaning of active love manifesting itself irrespective of what we deserve, there comes a second great aspect of the word. The cause gives its name to the effect, and the communicated blessings and gifts which flow to men from the love of God are designated by this great name. You know we have the same kind of idiom in our own tongue. 'Kindness' is the disposition; '*a* kindness' is a single deed which flows from that disposition. 'Favour' is the way in which we regard a man; '*a* favour' is the act or gift which manifests and flows from the regard. The water in the pitchers is the same as the water in the spring. The name of the cause is extended to all the lustrous variety of its effects. So the complex whole of the blessings and gifts which Jesus Christ brings to us, and which are sometimes designated in view of what they do for us, as salvation or eternal life, are also designated in view of that in God from which they come, as being collectively His 'grace.'

All the gifts that Christ brings are, we may say, but the love of God made visible in its bestowal upon us. The meteor that rushes through space catches fire when it passes into our atmosphere. The love of God, when it comes into our manifold necessities, is made visible in the large gifts which it bestows upon them.

And then there is a final application of the expression which is deduced from that second one—viz., the specific and individual excellences of character or conduct which result from the communication to men of the blessings that flow to Him from the love of God

So these three: first the fountain, the love undisturbed and unalterable; second, the stream, the manifold gifts and blessings that flow to us through Christ; and third, the little cupfuls that each of us have, the various beauties and excellences of character which are developed under the fertilising influences of the sunshine of that love—these three are all included in this great Christian word.

There are other phases of its employment in the New Testament which I do not need to trouble you with now. But thus far we just come to this, that the one ground on which all steadfastness and calm tranquillity and settlement of nature and character can be reared is that we shall be in touch with God, shall be conscious of His love, and shall be receiving into our hearts the strength that He bestows. Man is a dependent creature; his make and his relationships to things round him render it impossible that the strength by which he is strong and the calmness by which he is established can be self-originated. They must come from without. There is only one way by which we can be kept from being drifted away by the currents and blown away by the tempests that run and range through every life, and that is that we shall anchor ourselves on God. His grace, His love possessed, and the sufficing gifts for all our hungry desires which come through that love possessed, these, and these alone, are the conditions of human stability.

II. And so I come, in the second place, to look at some of the various ways in which this establishing grace calms and stills the life.

We men are like some of the islands in the Eastern Tropics, fertile and luxuriant, but subject to be swept by typhoons, to be shaken by earthquakes, to be devastated by volcanoes. Around us there gather external foes assailing our steadfastness, and within us there lie even more formidable enemies to an established and settled peace. We are like men carrying powder through a conflagration; bearing a whole magazine of combustibles within us, upon which at any moment a spark may alight. How are such creatures ever to be established? My text tells us by drawing into themselves the love, the giving love of God; and in the consciousness of that love, and in the rest of spirit that comes from the true possession of its gifts, there will be found the secret of tranquillity for the most storm-ridden life.

I would note, as one of the aspects of the tranquillity and establishment that comes from this conscious possession of the giving love of God, how it delivers men from all the dangers of being 'carried away by divers strange doctrines.' I do not give much for any orthodoxy which is not vitalised by personal experiences of the indwelling love of God. I do not care much what a man believes, or what he denies, or how he may occupy himself intellectually with the philosophical and doctrinal aspect of Christian revelation. The question is, how much of it has filtered from his brain into his heart, and has become part of himself, and verified to himself by his own experience? So much, and not one hairbreadth more, of the Christian creed is your creed. So much as you have lived out, so much you are sure of because you have not only thought it but felt it, and cannot for a moment doubt, because your hearts have risen up and witnessed to its truth. About these parts of your belief there will be no fluctuation. There is no real and permanent grasp of any parts of religious truth except such as is verified by personal experience. And that sturdy blind man in the gospels had got hold of the true principle of the most convincing Christian apologetics when he said, 'You may talk as long as you like about the question whether this man is a sinner or not; settle it anyhow you please. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.' The 'grace' that had come to him in a purely external form established as a foundation axiom for his thinking, that the man who had done that for him was a messenger from God. That is the way by which you will come to a hold worth calling so of Christian truth, and unless you come to it by that hold it does not matter much whether you believe it or deny it all.

But, if there be such a living consciousness of the true possession of God's love giving you these blessings. then with great equanimity and openness of mind you can regard the discussion that may be raging about a great many so-called 'burning' questions. If I know that Jesus Christ died for me, and that my soul is saved because He did, it does not matter very much to me who wrote the Pentateuch, or whether the Book of Jonah is a parable or a history. I can let all such questions—and I only refer to these as specimens—be settled by appropriate evidence, by the experts, without putting myself in a fluster, and can say, 'I am not going to be carried away. My heart is established in grace.'

Still further, this conscious possession of the grace of God will keep a man very quiet amidst all the occasions for agitation which changing circumstances bring. Such there are in every life. Nothing continues in one stay. Thunder-claps, earthquakes, tempests, shocks of doom come to every one of us. Is it possible that amidst this continuous fluctuation, in which nothing is changeless but the fact of change, we can stand fixed and firm? Yes! As they say on the other side of the Border, there is a 'lown' place at the back of the wall. There is shelter only in one spot, and that is when we have God between us and the angry blast. And oh, brother, if there steal into a man's heart, and be faithfully kept there, the quiet thought that God is with him, to bless and keep and communicate to him all that he needs, why should he be troubled? 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings.' What! In this world full of evil? Yes. 'He shall not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is fixed; trusting in the Lord.' An empty heart is an easily agitated heart. A full heart, like a full sack, stands upright, and it is not so easy for the wind to whirl it about as if it were empty. They who are rooted in God will have a firm bole, which will be immovable, howsoever branches may sway and creak, and leaves may flutter and dance, or even fall, before the power of the storm. They who have no hold upon that grace are like the chaff which the wind drives from the threshing-floor. The storms of life will sweep you away unless the heart be 'established in grace.'

Further, another form of the stability communicated by that possessed love of God is in regard to the internal occasions for agitation. Passion, lust, hot desires, bitter regrets, eager clutching after uncertain and insufficient and perishable good, all these will be damped down if the love of God lives in our hearts. Oh, brethren, it is ourselves that disturb ourselves, and not the world that disturbs us. 'There is no joy but calm'; and there is no calm but in the possession of the grace which is the giving love of God.

III. Lastly, my text suggests how beautiful a thing is the character of the man that is established in grace.

The word translated 'good' in my text would be better rendered 'fair,' or 'lovely,' or 'beautiful,' or some such expression conveying the idea that the writer was thinking, not so much about the essential goodness as about the beauty, in visible appearance, of a character which was thus established by grace. Is there anything fairer than the strong, steadfast, calm, equable character, unshaken by the storms of passion, unaffected by the blasts of calamity, undevastated by the lava from the hellish subterranean fires that are in every soul; and yet not stolidly insensible nor obstinately conservative, but open to the inspiration of each successive moment, and gathering the blessed fruit of all mutability in a more profound and unchanging possession of the unchanging good? Surely the gospel which brings to men the possibility of being thus established brings to them the highest ideal of fair human character.

So do you see to it that you rectify your notions of what makes the beauty of character. There is many a poor old woman in a garret who presents, if not to men, at any rate to angels and to God, a far fairer character than the vulgar ideals which most people have. The beauty of meek patience, of persistent endeavour, of calm, steadfast trust, is fairer than all the 'purple patches' which the world admires because they are gaudy, and which an eye educated by looking at Jesus turns from with disgust. And do you see to it that you cultivate that type of excellence. It is a great deal easier to cultivate other kinds. It is hard to be quiet, hard to rule one's stormy nature, hard to stand 'foursquare to every wind that blows.' But it is possible—possible on one condition, that we drive our roots through all the loose shingle on the surface, 'the things seen and temporal,' and penetrate to the eternal substratum that lies beneath it all.

Then, my brother, if we keep ourselves near Jesus Christ, and let His grace flow into our hearts, then we, too, shall be able to say, 'Because I set Him at my right hand I shall not be moved,' and we may be able to carry, by His grace, even through the storms of life and amidst all the agitations of our own passions and desires, a steady light, neither blown about by tempests without, nor pulsating with alternations of brightness and dimness by reason of intermittent supplies from within, but blazing with the steadfast splendour of the morning star. 'He that believeth shall not make haste.'

OUR ALTAR

'We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle. 15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' —Heb. xiii. 10, 15.

'We *have* an altar.' There is a certain militant emphasis on the words in the original, as if they were an assertion of something that had been denied. Who the deniers are is plain enough. They were the adherents of Judaism, who naturally found Christianity a strange contrast to their worship, of which altar and sacrifice were prominent features.

Just as to heathen nations the ritual of Judaism, its empty shrine, and temple without a God, were a puzzle and a scoff, so to heathen and Jew, the bare, starved worship of the Church, without temple, priest, sacrifice, or altar, was a mystery and a puzzle.

The writer of this letter in these words, then, in accordance with the central theme of his whole Epistle, insists that Christianity has more truly than heathenism or Judaism, altar and sacrifice.

And he is not content with alleging its possession of the reality of the altar, but he goes further, insists upon the superiority, even in that respect, of the Christian system.

He points to the fact that the great sin-offering of the Jewish ritual was not partaken of by the offerers, but consumed by fire without the camp, and he implies, in the earlier words of my text, that the Christian sacrifice differs from, and is superior to, the Jewish in this particular, that on it the worshippers feasted and fed.

Then, in the last words of my text, he touches upon another point of superiority—viz., that all Christian men are priests of this altar, and have to offer upon it sacrifices of thanksgiving.

And so he exalts the purely spiritual worship of Christianity as not only possessed of all which the gorgeous rituals round about it presented, but as being high above them even in regard to that which seemed their special prerogative. So, then, we have three things here—our Christian altar; our Christian feast on the sacrifice; and our Christian sacrifices on the altar. Let us regard these successively.

I. First, then, our Christian altar.

'We *have*,' says the writer, with a triumphant emphasis upon the word, 'We have an altar': 'though there seems none visible in our external worship; and some of our converts miss the sensuous presentation to which they were accustomed; and others are puzzled by it, and taunt us with its absence.'

Now it is to be noticed, I think, that though in sacrificial religions the altar is the centre-point round which the temple is reared, it is of no moment in itself, and only comes into consideration as being that upon which the sacrifice is offered. So I do not suppose that any specific object was in the mind of the writer as answering to the altar in these sacrificial systems. He was thinking most of the sacrifice that was laid upon the altar, and of the altar only in connection therewith. But if we are not satisfied with such an explanation of the words, there are two interpretations open to us.

One is that the Cross is the altar. But that seems to me too gross and material, and savouring too much of the very error which this whole Epistle is written to destroy—viz., that the material is of moment, as measured against the spiritual. The other explanation is much to be preferred, according to which, if the altar has any special significance, it means the divine-human personality of Jesus Christ, on and in which the sacrifice is offered.

But the main thing to be laid hold of here is, I take it, that the central fact of Christianity is an altar, on which lies a sacrifice. If we are to accept the significance that I have suggested as possible for the emblem of my text, then the altar expresses the great mystery and gospel of the Incarnation, and the sacrifice expresses the great mystery and gospel of the passion of Christ's life and death, which is the atonement for our sins.

But that possibly is too much of a refinement, and so I confine myself here to the general ideas suggested

—that the very living heart of the gospel is an altar and a sacrifice. That idea saturates the whole New Testament, from the page where John the forerunner's proclamation is, 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world,' to the last triumphant vision in which the Apocalyptic seer 'beheld a Lamb as it had been slain'; the eternal Co-Regnant of the universe, and the mediation through whom the whole surrounding Church for ever worships the Father.

The days are past, as it seems to me, when any man can reasonably contend that the New Testament does not teach—in every page of it, I was going to say—this truth of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Time was when violent contortions and effort were resorted to in order to explain its language as not necessarily involving that significance. But we have got beyond that now, and we oftener hear from deniers this: 'Oh yes! I admit that throughout the New Testament this sacrificial idea is present, but that is only a chip of the old shell of Judaism, and we are above that level of religious thought.'

Now, I am not going to enter upon a discussion, for which neither place nor time are suited; but I will just suggest that the relation between the ancient system of revelation, with its sacrifice, altar, priest, temple, and the new system of Christianity is far more profoundly, and, I believe, far more philosophically, set forth in this Epistle to the Hebrews, as being the relation between shadow and substance, between prophecy and fulfilment, than when the old is contemptuously brushed aside as 'Hebrew old clothes,' with which the true Christianity has no concern. Judaism *was* because Christ was *to be*, and the ancient ritual (whether modern ideas of the date of its origin be accepted or no) was a God-appointed mirror, in which the shadow of the coming event was presented. Jesus Christ is all which temple, priest, altar, sacrifice proclaimed should one day be. And just as the relation between Christ's work and the Judaic system of external ritual sacrifices is that of shadow and substance, prophecy and fulfilment, so, in analogous manner, the relation between the altar and sacrifice of the New Testament and all the systems of heathenism, with their smoking altars, is that these declare a want, and this affords its supply; that these are the confession of humanity that it is conscious of sin, separation, alienation, and that need of a sacrifice, and that Christ is what heathenism in all lands has wailed that it needs, and has desperately hoped that it might find.

There are many attempts made to explain on other grounds the universality of sacrifice, and to weaken the force of its witness to the deep necessities of humanity as rooted in the consciousness of sin, but I venture to affirm that all these are superficial, and that the study of comparative religions goes on wrong lines unless it recognises in the whole heathen world a longing, the supply of which it recognises in Jesus Christ and His work. I venture to say that that is a truer philosophy of religion than much that nowadays calls itself by the name.

And what lies in this great thought? I am not going to attempt a theory of the Atonement. I do not believe that any such thing is completely possible for us. But this, at least, I recognise as being fundamental and essential to the thought of my text; 'we have an altar,' that Christ in His representative relation, in His true affinity to every man upon earth, has in His life or death taken upon Himself the consequences of human transgression, not merely by sympathy, nor only by reason of the uniqueness of His representative relation, but by willing submission to that awful separation from the Father, of which the cry out of the thick darkness of the Cross, 'Why hast Thou forsaken Me?' is the unfathomable witness. Thus, bearing our sin, He bears it away, and 'we have an altar.'

Now notice that this great truth has a distinct teaching for those who hanker after externalities of ritual. The writer of this Epistle uses it for the purpose of declaring that in the Christian Church, because of its possession of the true sacrifice, there is no room for any other; that priest, temple, altar, sacrifice in any material external forms are an anachronism and a contradiction of the very central idea of the gospel. And it seems very strange that sections of Christendom should so have been blind to the very meaning of my text, and so missed the lesson which it teaches, and fallen into the error which it opposes, as that these very words, which are a protest against any materialisation of the idea of altar and sacrifice, should have been twisted to mean by the altar the table of the Lord, and by sacrifice the communion of His body and blood. But so it is. So strong are the tendencies in our weak humanity to grasp at some sensuous embodiment of the truth that the Christian Church, as a whole, has not been able to keep on the lofty levels of my text, and has hungered after some external signs to which it may attach notions of efficacy which attach only to the spiritual sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Thus we have got a strange contradiction, as it seems to me, of the spirit and letter of my text, and of the whole Epistle from which it comes, and there has crept surreptitiously into, and been obstinately maintained in, large sections of the Christian Church the idea of a sacrificing priesthood, and of a true sacrifice offered upon a material altar. My text protests against all that, and said to these early Christians what it says to us: 'Go into your upper rooms and there offer your worship, which to sense seems so bare and starved. Never mind though people say there is nothing in your system for sense to lay hold of. So much the better. Never mind though you can present no ritual with an altar, and a priest, and a sacrifice. All these are swept away for ever, because once Jesus Christ hath put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. Our temple is His body; our priest is before the throne. We rear no altar; He has died. Our sacrifice was offered on Calvary, and henceforward our worship, cleared from these materialities, rises unto loftier regions, and we worship God in the spirit, and have no confidence in the flesh.'

Still further, this truth has a bearing on the opposite pole of error, on those who would fain have a Christianity without an altar. I am not going to say how far genuine discipleship of Jesus Christ is possible with the omission of this article from the creed. It is no business of mine to determine that, but it is my business, as I think, to assert this, that a Christianity without an altar is a Christianity without power; impotent to move the world or to control the individual heart, inadequate to meet the needs and the cravings of men. Where are the decaying Christians? Where are the Christians that have let go the central fact of an incarnate sacrifice for the world's sin? The answer to the two questions is the same. Wherever you find a feeble grasp of that central truth, or a faltering utterance of it on the part of the preachers, there you find deadness and formality.

Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ's servants, I was going to say, obey the same law, and that law is, no cross, no crown. If Christ has not died, the world's sacrifice, He will never reign, the world's King. If His Cross be an altar it is a throne. If it be not, it is merely a gallows, on which a religious enthusiast, with many sweet and lovable qualities, died a long time ago, and it is nothing to me. 'We have an altar,' or else we have no religion worth keeping.

II. Mark here, secondly, our feast on the sacrifice.

From this altar, says the writer, the adherents of the ancient system have no right to partake. That implies that those who have left the ancient system have the right to partake, and do partake. Now the writer is drawing a contrast, which he proceeds to elaborate, between the great sacrifice on the Day of Atonement and the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. The former was not, as many other sacrifices were, partaken of by priests and worshippers, but simply the blood was brought within the holy place, and the whole of the rest of the sacrifice consumed in a waste spot without the camp. And this contrast is in the writer's mind. We have a sacrifice on which we feast. That is to say, the Christ who died for my sins is not only my means of reconciliation with God, but His sacrifice and death are the sustenance of my spiritual life. We live upon the Christ that died for us. That this is no mere metaphor, but goes penetratingly and deep down to the very basis of the spiritual life, is attested sufficiently by many a word of Scripture on which I cannot now dwell. The life of the Christian is the indwelling Christ. For he whose heart hath not received that Christ within him is dead whilst he lives, and has no possession of the one true life for a human spirit, viz., the life of union with God. Christ in us is the consequence of Christ for us; and that Christianity is all imperfect which does not grasp with equal emphasis the thought of the sacrifice or the cross, and of the feast or the sacrifice.

But how is that feeding on the sacrifice accomplished? 'He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.' He that believeth, eateth. He that with humble faith makes Christ his very own, and appropriates as the nourishment and basis of his own better life the facts of the life and death of sacrifice, he truly lives thereby. To eat is to believe; to believe is to live.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how, though there be no reference in the words of my text, as I have tried to show, to the external rite of the communion of the Lord's body and blood, and though the 'altar' here has no reference whatever to that table, yet there is a connection between the two representations, inasmuch as the one declares in words what the other sets forth in symbol, and the meaning of the feast on the sacrifice is expressed by this great word. 'This is My body, broken for you.' 'This is the new covenant in My blood': 'Drink ye all of it.' 'We have an altar,' and though it be not the table on which the symbols of our Lord's sacrificial death are spread for us, yet these symbols and the words of my text, like the words of His great discourse in the sixth chapter of John's Gospel, point to the same fact, that the spiritual participation of Christ by faith is the reality of 'eating of Him,' and the condition of living for ever.

III. And now, lastly, my text suggests our Christian offerings on the altar.

'By Him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually.' What are these offerings? Christ's death stands alone, incapable of repetition, meeting no repetition, the eternal, sole, 'sufficient obligation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.' But there be other kinds of sacrifice. There are sacrifices of thanksgiving as well as for propitiation. And we, on the footing of that great sacrifice to which we can add nothing, and on which alone we must rest, may bring the offerings of our thankful hearts. These offerings are of a two-fold sort, says the writer. There are words of praise. There are works of beneficence. The service of man is sacrifice to God. That is a deep saying and reaches far. Such praise and such beneficence are only possible on the footing of Christ's sacrifice, for only on that footing is our praise acceptable; and only when moved by that infinite mercy and love shall we yield ourselves, thank-offerings to God.

And thus, brethren, the whole extent of the Christian life, in its inmost springs, and in its outward manifestations, is covered by these two thoughts—the feast on the sacrifice once offered, and the sacrifices which we in our turn offer on the altar. If we thus, moved by the mercy of God, 'yield ourselves as living sacrifices, which is our reasonable service,' then not only will life be one long thank-offering, but as the Apostle puts it in another place, death itself may become, too, a thankful surrender to Him. For He says, 'I am ready to be offered.' And so the thankful heart, resting on the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ, makes all life a thanksgiving, 'death God's endless mercy seals, and makes the sacrifice complete.' There is one Christ that can thus hallow and make acceptable our living and our dying, and that is the Christ that has died for us, and lives that in Him we may be priests to God. There is only one Christianity that will do for us what we will need, and that is the Christianity whose centre is an altar, on which the Son of God, our Passover, is slain for us.

'WITHOUT THE CAMP'

'Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach. 14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.'—HEB. xiii. 13, 14.

CALVARY was outside Jerusalem. That wholly accidental and trivial circumstance is laid hold of in the context, in order to give picturesque force to the main contention and purpose of this Epistle. One of the solemn parts of the ritual of Judaism was the great Day of Atonement, on which the sacrifice that took away the sins of the nation was borne outside the camp, and consumed by fire, instead of being partaken of by the priests, as were most of the other sacrifices. Our writer here sees in these two roughly parallel things, not an argument but an imaginative illustration of great truths. Though he does not mean to say that the death on Calvary was intended to be pointed to by the unique arrangement in question, he does mean to say that the coincidence of the two things helps us to grasp two great truths—one, that Jesus Christ really did what that old sacrifice expressed the need for having done, and the other that, in His death on Calvary, the Jewish nation, as one of the parables has it, 'cast Him out of the vineyard.' In the context, he urges this analogy between the two things.

But a Christ outside the camp beckons His disciples to His side. If any man serve Him, he has to follow Him, and the blessedness, as well as the duty, of the servant on earth, as well as in heaven, is to be where his Master is. So the writer finds here a picturesque way to enforce the great lesson of his treatise, namely, that the Jewish adherent to Christianity must break with Judaism. In the early stages, it was possible to combine faith in Christ and adherence to the Temple and its ritual. But now that by process of time and experience the Church has learnt better who and what Christ is, that which was in part has to be done away, and the Christian Church is to stand clear of the Jewish synagogue.

Now it is to be distinctly understood that the words of my text, in the writer's intention, are not a general principle or exhortation, but that they are a special commandment to a certain class under special circumstances, and when we use them, as I am going to do now, for a wider purpose, we must remember that that wider purpose was by no means in the writer's mind. What he was thinking about was simply the relation between the Jewish Christian and the Jewish community. But if we take them as we may legitimately do—only remembering that we are diverting them from their original intention—as carrying more general lessons for us, what they seem to teach is that faithful discipleship involves detachment from the world. This commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp,' stands, if you will notice, between two reasons for it, which buttress it up, as it were, on either side. Before it is enunciated, the writer has been pointing, as I have tried to show, to the thought that a Christ without the camp necessarily involves disciples without the camp. And he follows it with another reason, 'here we have no continuing city, but we seek that which is to come.' Here, then, is a general principle, supported on either side by a great reason.

Let me first try to set before you,

I. What this detachment is not.

The Jewish Christian was obliged utterly and outwardly to break his connection with Judaism, on the peril, if he did not, of being involved in its ruin, and, as was historically the case with certain Judaising sects, of losing his Christianity altogether. It was a cruel necessity, and no wonder that it needed this long letter to screw the disciples of Hebrew extraction up to the point of making the leap from the sinking ship to the deck of the one that floated. The parallel does not hold with regard to us. The detachment from the world, or the coming out from the camp, to which my text exhorts, is not the abandonment of our relations with what the Bible calls 'the world,' and what we call—roughly meaning the same thing—society. The function of the Christian Church as leaven, involves the necessity of being closely associated, and in contact with, all forms of human life, national, civic, domestic, social, commercial, intellectual, political. Does my text counsel an opposite course? 'Go forth without the camp,'—does that mean huddle yourself together into a separate flock, and let the camp go to the devil? By no means. For the society or world, out of which the Christian is drawn by the attraction of the Cross, like iron filings out of a heap by a magnet, is in itself good and God-appointed. It is He 'that sets the solitary in families.' It is He that gathers humanity into the bonds of civic and national life. It is He that gives capacities which find their sphere, their education, and their increase in the walks of intellectual or commercial or political life. And He does not build up with one hand and destroy with the other, or set men by His providence in circumstances out of which He draws them by His grace. By no means. To go apart from humanity is to miss the very purpose for which God has set the Church in the world. For contact with the sick to be healed is requisite for healing, and they are poor disciples of the 'Friend of publicans and sinners' who prefer to consort with Pharisees. 'Let both grow together till the harvest'—the roots are intertwined, and it is God that has intertwined them.

Now, I know that one does not need to insist upon this principle to the average Christianity of this day, which is only too ready to mingle itself with the world, but one does need to insist that, in so mingling, detachment from the world is still to be observed; and it does need to be taught that Christian men are not lowering the standard of the Christian life, when they fling themselves frankly and energetically into the various forms of human activity, if and only if, whilst they do so, they still remember and obey the commandment, 'Let us go forth unto Him without the camp.' The commandment misinterpreted so as to be absolutely impossible to be obeyed, becomes a snare to people who do not keep it, and yet sometimes feel as if they were to blame, because they do not. And, therefore, I turn in the next place to consider—

II. What this detachment really is.

Will you let me put what I have to say into the shape of two or three plain, practical exhortations, not because I wish to assume a position of authority or command, but only in order to give vividness and point to my thoughts?

First, then, let us habitually nourish the inner life of union with Jesus Christ. Notice the words of my text, and see what comes first and what comes second. 'Let us go forth unto Him'—that is the main thing: 'Without the camp' is second, and a consequence; 'unto Him,' is primary, which is just to say that the highest, widest, noblest, all-comprehensive conception of what a Christian life is, is that it is union with Jesus Christ, and whatever else it is follows from that. The soul is ever to be looking up through all the shadows and shows, the changes and circumstances, of this fleeting present unto Him, and seeking to be more closely united with Him. Union with Him is life, and separation from Him is death. To be so united is to be a Christian. Never mind about camps or anything else, to begin with. If the heart is joined to Jesus, then all the rest will come right. If it is not, then you may make regulations as many as you like, and they will only be red tape to entangle your feet in. 'Let us go forth unto Him'; that is the sovereign commandment. And how is that to be done? How is it to be done but by nourishing habitual consciousness of union with Him and life in Him, by an habitual reference of all our acts to Him? As the Roman Catholics put it, in their hard external way, 'the practice of the presence of God' is the keynote to all real, vigorous Christianity. For, brethren, such an habitual fellowship with Jesus Christ is possible for us. Though with many interruptions, no doubt, still ideally is it possible that it shall be continuous and real. It is possible, perfectly possible, that it shall be a great deal more continuous than, alas! it is with many of us.

Depend upon it, this nourishing of an inward life of fellowship with Jesus, so that we may say, 'our lives are hid'—hid, after all vigorous manifestation and consistent action—'with Christ in God,' will not weaken, but increase, the force with which we act on the things seen and temporal. There is an unwholesome kind of mysticism which withdraws men from the plain duties of everyday life; and there is a deep, sane, wholesome, and eminently Christian mysticism which enables men to come down with greater force, and to act with more decision, with more energy, with more effect, in all the common deeds of life. The greatest mystics have been the hardest workers. Who was it that said, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'? That man had gone far, very far, towards an habitual consciousness of Christ's presence, and it was the same man that said, 'That which cometh upon me daily is the care of all the churches.' The greatest mystic of the Middle Ages, the saint that rode by the lake all day long, and was so absorbed in contemplation that he said at night, 'Where is the lake?' was the man that held all the threads of European politics in his hands, and from his cell at Clairvaux guided popes, and flung the nations of the West into a crusade. John Wesley was one of the hardest workers that the Church has ever had, and was one of those who lived most habitually without the camp. Be sure of this, that the more our lives are wrapped in Christ, the more energetic will they be in the world. They tell us that the branches of a spreading tree describe roughly the same circumference in the atmosphere that its roots do underground, and so far as our roots extend in Christ, so far will our branches spread in the world. 'Let us go forth unto Him, without the camp.'

Again, let me say, do the same things as other people, but with a difference. The more our so-called civilisation advances, the more, I was going to say, mechanical, or at least largely released from the control of the will and personal idiosyncrasy, become great parts of our work. The Christian weaver drives her looms very much in the same fashion that the non-Christian girl who is looking after the next set does. The Christian clerk adds up his figures, and writes his letters, very much in the same fashion that the worldly clerk does. The believing doctor visits his patients, and writes out his prescriptions in the fashion that his neighbour who is not a Christian does. But there is always room for the personal equation—always! and two lives may be, superficially and roughly, the same, and yet there may be a difference in them impalpable, undefinable, but very obvious and very real and very mighty. The Christian motive is love to Jesus Christ and fellowship with Him, and that motive may be brought to bear upon all life—

'A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine.'

He that for Christ's sake does a common thing lifts it out of the fatal region of the commonplace, and makes it great and beautiful. We do not want from all Christian people specifically Christian service, in the narrow sense which that phrase has acquired, half so much as we want common things done from an uncommon motive; worldly things done because of the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts. And, depend upon it, just as, from some unseen bank of violets, there come odours in opening spring, so from the unspoken and deeply hidden motive of love to Jesus Christ, there will be a fragrance in our commonest actions which all men will recognise. They tell us that rivers which flow from lakes are so clear that they are tinged throughout with celestial blue, because all the mud that they brought down from their upper reaches has been deposited in the still waters of the lake from which they flow; and if from the deep tarn of love to Jesus Christ in our hearts the stream of our lives flows out, it will be like the Rhone below Geneva, distinguishable from the muddy waters that run by its side in the same channel. Two people, partners in business, joined in the same work, marching step for step in the same ranks, may yet be entirely distinguishable and truly separate, because, doing the same things, they do them from different motives.

Let me say, still further, and finally about this matter, that sometimes we shall have to come actually out of the camp. The world as God made it is good; society is ordained by God. The occupations which men pursue are of His appointment, for the most part. But into the thing that was good there have crept all manner of corruptions and abominations, so that often it will be a Christian duty to come away from all outward connection with that which is incurably corrupt. I know very well that a morality which mainly consists of prohibitions is pedantic and poor. I know very well that a Christianity which interprets such a precept as this of my text simply as meaning abstinence from certain conventionally selected and branded forms of life, occupation, or amusement, is but a very poor affair. But 'Thou shalt not' is very often absolutely necessary as a support to 'Thou shalt.' If you go into an Eastern city, you will find the houses with their fronts to the street, having narrow slits of windows all barred, and a heavy gate, frowning and ugly. But pass within, and there are flower-beds and fountains. The frowning street front is there for the defence of the fountains and the flower-beds within, from the assaults of foes, and speaks of a disturbed state of society, in which no flowers can grow and no fountains can bubble and sparkle, unless a strong barrier is round them. And so 'thou shalt not,' in a world like this, is needful in order that 'thou shalt' shall have fair play. No law can be laid down for other people. Every man must settle this matter of abstinence for himself. Things that you may do, perhaps I may not do; things that you may not do, I very likely may. 'A liberal Christianity,' as the world calls it, is often a very shallow Christianity. 'A sour Puritanical severity,' as loose-living men call it, is very often plain, Christian morality. An inconsistent Christian may be hailed as 'a good fellow,' and laughed at behind his back. Samson made sport for the Philistines when he was blind. The uncircumcised do often say of professing Christians, that try to be like them, and to keep step with them, 'What do these Hebrews here?' and God always says to such, 'What dost thou here, Elijah?'

Lastly—

III. Why this detachment is enforced.

'For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come.' That translation does not give the full force of the original, for it suggests the idea of a vague uncertainty in the seeking, whereas what the writer means is, not 'one to come,' but *one which is coming.* The Christian object of seeking is definite, and it is not merely future but present, and in process of being realised even here and now, and tending to completion. Paul uses the same metaphor of the city in one of his letters, 'Your citizenship is in heaven.' He says that to the Philippians. Philippi was a colony; that is to say, it was a bit of Rome put down in a foreign land, with Roman laws, its citizens enrolled upon the registers of the Roman tribes, and not under the jurisdiction of the provincial governor That is what we Christians are, whether we know it or not. We are here in an order to which we outwardly belong, but in the depths of our being we belong to another order of things altogether. Therefore the essentials of the Christian life may be stated as being the looking forward to the city, and the realising of our affinities to it and not to the things around us. In the measure in which, dear brethren, we realise to what community we belong, will the things here be seen to be fleeting and alive to our deepest selves. 'Here we have no continuing city' is not merely the result of the transiency of temporal things, and the brevity of our earthly lives, but it is much rather the result of our affinity to the other order of things beyond the seas.

Abraham dwelt in tents, because he 'looked for a city,' and so it was better for him to stop on the breezy uplands, though the herbage was scant, than to go with Lot into the vale of Sodom, though it looked like the garden of the Lord. In like manner, the more intensely we realise that we belong to the city, the more shall we be willing to 'go forth without the camp.' Let these two thoughts dominate our minds and shape our lives; our union with Jesus Christ and our citizenship of the heavenly Jerusalem. In the measure in which they do, it will be no sacrifice for us to come out of the transient camp, because we shall thereby go to Him and come to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, 'which hath the foundations.'

THE CHRISTIAN SACRIFICE

'By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name. 16. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'—HEB. xiii. 15, 16.

MUCH attention is given now to the study of comparative religion. The beliefs and observances of the rudest tribes are narrowly scrutinised, in order to discover the underlying ideas. And many a practice which seems to be trivial, absurd, or sanguinary is found to have its foundation in some noble and profound thought. Charity and insight have both gained by the study.

But, singularly enough, the very people who are so interested in the *rationale* of the rites of savages will turn away when anybody applies a similar process to the ritual of the Jews. That is what this Epistle to the Hebrews does. It translates altar, ritual festivals, priests, into thoughts; and it declares that Jesus Christ is the only adequate and abiding embodiment of these thoughts. We are not dressing Christian truth in a foreign garb when we express the substance of its revelation in language borrowed from the ritualistic system that preceded it. But we are extricating truths, which the world needs to-day as much as ever it did, from the form in which they were embodied for one stage of religion, when we translate them into their Christian equivalents.

So the writer here has been speaking about Christ as by His death sanctifying His people. And on that great thought, that He is what all priesthood symbolises, and what all bloody sacrifices reach out towards, he builds this grand exhortation of my text, which is at once a lofty conception of what the Christian life ought to be, and a directory as to the method by which it may become so. 'By Him let us offer sacrifices continually, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.'

Now, it seems to me that there are here mainly three points to be looked at. First, the basis of; second, the material of; and third, the divine delight in, the sacrifices of the Christian life. And to these three points I ask your attention.

I. First, then, note here the emphatic way in which the one basis of Christian sacrifice is laid down.

Anybody who can consult the original will see, what indeed is partially expressed in our translation, that the position of these two words 'through' (or by) 'Him' underscores and puts great emphasis upon them. There are two thoughts which may be included in them; the one, that Jesus is the Priest by whose mediation we come to God, and the other that He is the sacrifice, on the footing of which we can present our sacrifices. It seems to me, however, that it is the latter idea principally that is in the writer's mind here. And on it I touch lightly in a few words.

Now, let me recall to you, as a world-wide fact which is expressed in the noblest form in the ancient Jewish ritual, that there was a broad line of distinction drawn between two kinds of sacrifices, differing in their material and in their purpose. If I wanted to use mere theological technicalities, which I do not, I should talk about the difference between sacrifices of propitiation and sacrifices of thanksgiving. But let us put these well-worn phrases on one side, as far as we can, for the moment. Here, then, is the fact that all the world over, and in the Mosaic ritual, there was expressed a double consciousness — one, that there was, somehow or other, a black dam between the worshipper and his Deity, which needed to be swept away; and the other, that when that barrier was removed there could be an uninterrupted flow of thanksgiving and of service. So on one altar was laid a bleeding victim, and on another were spread the flowers of the field, the fruits of the earth, all things gracious, lovely, fair, and sweet, as expressions of the thankfulness of the reconciled worshippers. One set of sacrifices expressed the consciousness of sin; the other expressed the joyful recognition of its removal.

Now I want to know whether that world-wide confession of need is nothing more to us than a mere piece of interesting reminiscence of a stage of development beyond which we have advanced. I do not believe that there is such a gulf of difference between the lowest savage and the most cultivated nineteenth-century Englishman, that the fundamental needs of the one, in spirit, are not almost as identical as are the fundamental needs of the one and the other in regard to bodily wants. And sure I am that, if the voice of humanity has declared all the world over, as it has declared, that it is conscious of a cloud that has come between it and the awful Power above, and that it seeks by sacrifice the removal of the cloud, the probability is that that need is your need and mine; and that the remedy which humanity has divined as necessary has some affinity with the remedy which God has revealed as provided.

I am not going to attempt theorising about the manner in which the life and death of Jesus Christ sweep away the barrier between us and God, and deal with the consciousness of transgression, which lies coiled and dormant, but always ready to wake and sting, in human hearts. But I do venture to appeal to each man's and woman's own consciousness, and to ask, Is there not something in us which recognises the necessity that the sin which stands between God and man shall be swept away? Is there not something in us which recognises the blessedness of the message, 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin'? Oh, brethren! do not fancy that it is a mere theological doctrine of an atonement that is in question. It is the possibility of loving access to God, as made possible through Jesus, and through Him alone, that I want to press upon your hearts. 'Through Him let us offer.'

II. Secondly, notice the light which our text throws upon the material or contents of the Christian sacrifice

I need not dwell at all, I suppose, upon the explanation of the words, which are plain enough. The writer seems to me to divide the sacrifice of praise, which he prescribes, into two parts, the praise of the lip and the praise of the life.

But before I deal with this twofold distribution of the thought, let me fix upon the main general idea that is expressed here, and that is that the highest notion, the noblest and purest of what a Christian life is, is that it is one long sacrifice. Have we risen to the height of that conception? I do not say, Have we attained to the fulfilment of it? The answer to the latter question one knows only too well. But has it ever dawned upon us that the true ideal of the Christian life which we profess to be living is this—a sacrifice?

Now, that thought involves two things. One is the continuous surrender of self, and that means the absolute suppression of our own wills; the bridling of our own inclinations and fancies; the ceasing obstinately to adhere to our own purposes and conceptions of what is good; the recognition that there is a higher will above us, ruling and guiding, to which we are to submit. Sacrifice means nothing if it does not mean surrender; and surrender is nothing if it is not the surrender of the will. It was a great deal easier for Abraham to take the knife in his hand, and climb the hill with the fixed intention of thrusting it into his son's heart, than it is for us to take the sword of the Spirit in our hands and slay our own wills, and I am here to say that unless we do we have very little right to call ourselves Christians.

But, then, surrender is only half the conception of the sacrifice which has to be accomplished in our whole days and selves. Surrender to God is the full meaning of sacrifice. And that implies the distinct reference of all that I am, and all that I do, to Him, as not only commanding, but as being the aim and end of my life. We are to labour on as at His command. You in your counting-houses, and mills, and shops, and homes; and we students in our studies, and laboratories, and lecture-rooms, are to link everything with Him, with His will, and with the thought of Him. What vice could live in that light? What meanness would not be struck dead if we were connected with that great reservoir of electric force? What slothfulness would not be spurred into unhasting and unresting zeal if all our work were referred to God? Unless our lives be thus sacrifice, in the full sense of conscious surrender to Him, we have yet to learn what is the meaning and the purpose of the propitiatory sacrifice on which we say that our lives are built.

I need not, I suppose, remind you at any length of how our text draws broad and deep the distinction between the nature and the scope of the fundamental offering made by Christ, and the offerings made by us. The one takes away the separating barrier; the other is the flow of the stream where the barrier had stood. The one is the melting away of the cloud that hid the sun; the other is the flashing of the mirror of my heart when the sun shines upon it. Our sacrifice is thanksgiving. Then there will be no reluctance because duty is heavy. There will be no grudging because requirements are great. There will be no avoiding of the obligations of the Christian life, and rendering as small a percentage by way of dividend as the Creditor up in the heavens will accept. If the offering is a thank-offering, then it will be given gladly. The grateful heart does not hold the scales like a scrupulous retail dealer afraid of putting the thousandth part of an ounce more in than can be avoided.

> 'Give all thou canst, high heaven rejects the lore
> Of nicely calculated less or more.'

Power is the measure of duty, and they whose offering is the expression of their thankfulness will heap incense upon the brazier, and cover the altar with flowers.

Ah, brethren, what a blessed life it would be for us, if indeed all the painfulness and harshness of duty, with all the efforts of constraint and restriction and stimulus which it so often requires, were transmuted into that glad expression of infinite obligation for the great sacrifice on which our life and hopes rest!

I do not purpose to say much about the two classes of sacrifice into which our writer divides the whole. Words come first, work follows. That order may seem strange, because we are accustomed to think more of work than words. But the Bible has a solemn reverence for man's utterances of speech, and many a protest against 'God's great gift of speech abused.' And the text rightly supposes that if there is in us any deep, real, abiding, life-shaping thankfulness for the gift of Jesus Christ, it is impossible that our tongues should cleave to the roofs of our mouths, and that we should be contented to live in silence. Loving hearts must speak. What would you think of a husband who never felt any impulse to tell his wife that she was dear to him; or a mother who never found it needful to unpack her heart of its tenderness, even in perhaps inarticulate croonings over the little child that she pressed to her heart? It seems to me that a dumb Christian, a man who is thankful for Christ's sacrifice and never feels the need to say so, is as great an anomaly as either of these I have described.

Brethren! the conventionalities of our modern life, the proper reticence about personal experience, the reverence due to sacred subjects, all these do prescribe caution and tact and many another thing, in limiting the evangelistic side of our speech; but is there any such limitation needful for the eucharistic, the thanksgiving side of our speech? Surely not. In some monasteries and nunneries there used to be a provision made that at every hour of the four and twenty, and at every moment of every hour, there should be one kneeling figure before the altar, repeating the psalter, so that night and day prayer and praise went up. It was a beautiful idea, beautiful as long as it was an idea, and, like a great many other beautiful ideas, made vulgar and sometimes ludicrous when it was put into realisation. But it is the symbol of what we should be, with hearts ever occupied with Him, and the voice of praise rising unintermittently from our hearts singing a quiet tune, all the day and night long, to Him who has loved us and given Himself for us.

And then the other side of this conception of sacrifice that my text puts forth is that of beneficence amongst men, in the general form of doing good, and in the specific form of giving money. Two aspects of this combination of word and work may be suggested. It has a message for us professing Christians. All that the world says about the uselessness of singing psalms, and praying prayers, while neglecting the miserable and the weak, is said far more emphatically in the Bible, and ought to be laid to heart, not because sneering, godless people say it, but because God Himself says it. It is vain to pray unless you work. It is sin to work for yourselves unless you own the bond of sympathy with all mankind, and live 'to do good and to communicate.' That is a message for others than Christians. There is no real foundation for a broad philanthropy except a deep devotion to God. The service of man is never so well secured as when it is the corollary and second form of the service of God.

III. And so, lastly—and only a word—note the divine delight in such sacrifice.

Ah! that is a wonderful thought, 'With such sacrifices God is well pleased.' Now I take it that that 'such' covers both the points on which I have been dwelling, and that the sacrifices which please Him are, first, those which are offered on the basis and footing of Christ's sacrifice, and, second, those in which word and work accord well, and make one music. 'With *such* sacrifices God is well pleased.'

We are sometimes too much afraid of believing that there is in the divine heart anything corresponding to our delight in gifts that mean love, because we are so penetrated with the imperfection of all that we can do and give; and sometimes because we are influenced by grand philosophic ideas of the divine nature, so that we think it degrading to Him to conceive of anything corresponding to our delight passing across it. But the Bible is wiser and more reverent than that, and it tells us that, however stained and imperfect our gifts, and however a man might reject them with scorn, God will take them if they are '*such*'—that is, offered through Jesus Christ. I dare say there are many parents who have laid away amongst their treasures some utterly useless thing that one of their little children once gave them. No good in it at all! No; but it meant love. And, depend upon it, 'if ye, being evil, know how to *take* good gifts'—though they are useless—'from your children, much more will your heavenly Father accept' your stained sacrifices if they come through Christ.

Dear brethren, my text preaches to us what is the true sacrifice of the true priesthood in the Christian Church. There is one Priest who stands alone, offering the one sacrifice that has no parallel nor second. No other shares in His priesthood of expiation and intercession. But around, and deriving their priestly character from Him, and made capable of rendering acceptable sacrifices through Him, stand the whole company of Christian people. And besides these there are no priesthoods and no sacrifices in the Christian vocabulary or in the Christian Church. Would that a generation that seems to be reeling backwards to the beggarly elements of an official priesthood, with all its corruptions and degradations of the Christian community, would learn the lesson of my text! 'Ye'—all of you, and not any selected number amongst you—'ye, all of you are a royal priesthood.' There are only two sacrifices in the Christian Church: the one offered once for all on Calvary, by the High Priest Himself; the sacrifice of ourselves, by ourselves, thank-offerings for Christ and His name, which are the true Eucharist.

GREAT HOPES A GREAT DUTY

'The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.'—HEB. xiii. 20.

A GREAT building needs a deep foundation; a leaping fountain needs a full spring. A very large and lofty prayer follows the words of my text, and these are the foundations on which it rests, the abundant source from which it soars heavenward. The writer asks for his readers nothing less than a complete, all-round, and thorough-going conformity to the will of God; and that should be our deepest desire and our conscious aim, that God may see His own image in us, for nothing less can be 'well-pleasing in His sight.' But does not such a dream of what we may be seem far too audacious, when we pursue the stained volume of our own lives, and remember what we are? Should we not be content with very much more modest hopes for ourselves, and with a vary partial attainment of them? Yes, if we look at ourselves; but to look at ourselves is not the way to pray, or the way to hope, or the way to grow, or the way to dare. The logic of Christian petitions and Christian expectations starts with God as the premiss, and thence argues the possibility of the impossible. It was because of all this great accumulation of truths, piled up in my text, that the writer found it in his heart to ask such great things for the humble people to whom he was writing, although he well knew that they were far from perfect, and were even in danger of making shipwreck of the faith altogether. My purpose now is to let him lead us along the great array of reasons for his great prayer, that we too may learn to desire and to expect, and to work for nothing short of this aim—the entire purging of ourselves from all evil and sin and the complete assimilation to our Lord. There are three points here: the warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God; the warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd; the warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

I. The warrant for our highest expectations in the name of God.

'The God of peace'—the name comes like a benediction into our restless lives and distracted hearts, and carries us away up into lofty regions, above the mutations of circumstances and the perturbations and agitations of our earthly life. No doubt, there may be some allusion here to the special circumstances of the recipients of this letter, for it is clear from the rest of the Epistle that they had much need for the peace of God to calm their agitations in the prospect of the collapse of the venerable system in which they had lived so long. It is obvious also that there were divisions of opinion amongst themselves, so that the invocation of the God of peace may have had a special sanctity and sweetness to them, considering the circumstances in which they were placed. But the designation has a bearing not so much on the condition of those to whom the words are spoken, as upon the substance of the grand prayer that follows it. It is because He is known to us as being 'the God of peace' that we may be quite sure that He will 'make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

And how does that great name, sweet and strong as it is, bear with it the weight of such an inference as that? Plainly enough because it speaks, first of all, of that which I may call an immanent characteristic of the divine nature. He is the tranquil God, dwelling above all disturbance which comes from variableness and all 'the shadows cast by turning'; dwelling above all possibilities of irritation or agitation. And yet that great ocean is not stagnant, but through all its depths flow currents of love, and in all its repose is intensest energy. The highest activity coincides with the supremest rest. The wheel revolves so swiftly that it stands as if motionless.

Then, just because of that profound divine repose, we may expect Him, by His very nature, to impart His own peace to the soul that seeks Him. Of course, it can be but the faintest shadow of that divine indisturbance which can ever fall, like a dove's wing, upon our restless lives. But still in the tranquillity of a quiet heart, in the harmonies of a spirit all concentrated on one purpose, in the independence of externals possible to a man who grasps God, in the victory over change which is granted to them who have pierced through the fleeting clouds and have their home in the calm blue beyond, there may be a quiet of heart which does not altogether put to shame that wondrous promise: 'My peace I give unto you.' It is possible that they 'which have believed' should 'enter into the rest' of God.

But if the impartation of some faint but real echo of His own great repose is the delight of the divine heart, how can it be done? There is only one way by which a man can be made peaceful, and that is by his being made good. Nothing else secures the true tranquillity of a human spirit without its conformity to the divine will. It is submission to the divine commandments and appointments, it is the casting-off of self with all its agitations and troubles, that secures our entering into rest. What a man needs for peace is, that his relations with God should be set right, that his own nature should be drawn into one and harmonised with itself, and that his relations with men should also be rectified.

For the first of these, we know that it is 'the Christ that died,' who is the means by which the alienation and enmity of heart between us and God can be swept away. For the second of them, we know that the only way by which this anarchic commonwealth within can be brought into harmony and order, and its elements prevented from drawing apart from one another, is that the whole man shall be bowed before God in submission to His will. The heart is like some stormy sea, tossed and running mountains high, and there is only one voice that can say to it, 'Peace: be still,' and that is the voice of God in Christ. There is only one power that, like the white moon in the nightly sky, can draw the heaped waters round the whole world after itself, and that is the power of Christ in His Cross and Spirit.

which brings the disobedient heart into submission, and unites the discordant powers in the liberty of a common service: so, brethren, if we are ever to have quiet hearts, they must come, not from favourable circumstances, nor from anything external. They can only come from the prayer being answered, 'Unite my heart to fear Thy name,' and then our inner lives will no longer be torn by contending passions—conscience pulling this way and desire that; a great voice saying within, 'you ought!' and an insistent voice answering, 'I will not'; but all within will be at one, and then there will be peace. 'The God of peace sanctify you wholly,' says one of the apostles, bringing out in the expression the same thought, that inasmuch as He who Himself is supreme repose must be infinitely desirous that we, His children, should share in His rest, He will, as the only way by which that rest can ever be attained, sanctify us wholly. When—and not till, and as soon as—we are thus made holy are we made at rest.

Nor let us forget that, on the other hand, the divine peace, which is 'shed abroad in our hearts' by the love of God, does itself largely contribute to perfect the holiness of a Christian soul. We read that 'the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,' and also that 'the peace of God will guard your hearts and minds,' and again that the peace of God will sit as umpire in our hearts, detecting evil, judging actions, awarding the prizes. For, indeed, when that peace lies like a summer morning's light upon our quiet hearts, there will be little in evil that will so attract us as to make us think it worth our while to break the blessed and charmed silence for the sake of any earthly influences or joys. They that dwell in the peace of God have little temptation to buy trouble, remorse perhaps, or agitation, by venturing out into the forbidden ground. So, brethren, the great name of the God of peace is itself a promise, and entitles us to expect the completeness of character which alone brings peace.

Then, further, we have here

II. The warrant for our highest expectations in the risen Shepherd.

'The God of peace who brought again'—or, perhaps, brought up—'from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep.' Now, it is remarkable that this is the only reference in this Epistle to the Hebrews to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The book is full of references to that which presupposes the Resurrection, namely, the ascended life of Jesus as the great High Priest within the veil, and the fact that only this once is the act of resurrection referred to, confirms the idea, that in the New Testament there is no division of thought between the point at which the line begins and the line itself, that the Ascension is but the prolongation of the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is but the beginning of the Ascension. But here the act, rather than the state into which it led, is dwelt upon as being more appropriate to the purpose in hand.

Then we may notice further, that in that phrase, 'the great Shepherd of the sheep,' there is a quotation from one of the prophets, where the words refer to Moses bringing up the people from the Red Sea. The writer of the Epistle adds to Isaiah's phrase one significant word, and speaks of 'that *great* Shepherd,' to remind us of the comparison which he had been running in an earlier part of the letter, between the leader of Israel and Christ.

So, then, we have here brought before us Jesus who is risen and ascended, as the great Shepherd of the sheep. Looking to Him, what are we heartened to believe are the possibilities and the divine purposes for each of those that put their trust in Him? Gazing in thought for a moment on that Lord risen from the grave, with the old love in His heart, and the old greetings upon His lips, we see there, of course, as everybody knows, the demonstration of the persistence of a human life through death, like some stream of fresh water holding on its course through a salt and stagnant sea, or plunging underground for a short space, to come up again flashing into the sunshine. But we see more than that. We see the measure of the power, as the Apostle has it, that works in us, 'according to the energy of the might of the power which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.' As we gaze, we see what may be called a type, but what is a great deal more than a type, of the possibilities of the risen life, as it may be lived even here and now, by every poor and humble soul that puts its trust in Him. The Resurrection of Jesus gives us the measure of the power that worketh in us.

But more than that, the risen Shepherd has risen as Shepherd, for the very purpose of imparting, to every soul that trusts in Him, His own life. And unless we grasp that truth, we shall not understand the place of the Resurrection in the Christian scheme, nor the ground on which the loftiest anticipations are not audacious for the poorest soul, and on which anything beneath the loftiest is, for the poorest, beneath what it might and should aspire to. When the alabaster box was broken, the ointment was poured forth and the house was filled with the odour. The risen Christ imparts His life to His people. And nothing short of their entire perfecting in all which is within the possibilities of human beauty and nobleness and purity, will be the adequate issue of that great death and triumphant Resurrection, and of the mighty. quickening power of a new life, which He thereby breathed into the dying world. On His Cross, and from His Tomb, and from His Throne, He has set agoing processes which never can reach their goal—and, blessed be God! never will stop their beneficent working—until every soul of man, however stained and evil, that puts the humblest trust in Him, and lives after His commandment, is become radiant with beauty, complete in holiness, victorious over self and sin, and is set for ever more at the right hand of God. Every anticipation that falls short of that, and all effort that lags behind that anticipation, is an insult to the Christ, and a trampling under foot of the blood of 'the covenant wherewith ye are sanctified.'

So, brother, open your mouth wide, and it will be filled. Expect great things; believe that what Jesus Christ came into the world and died to do, what Jesus Christ left the world and lives to carry on, will be done in you, and that you too will be made complete in Him. For the Shepherd leads and the sheep follow—here afar off, often straying, and getting lost or torn by the brambles, and worried by the wolves. But He leads and they do follow, and the time comes when 'they shall follow the Lamb *whithersoever* He goeth,' and be close behind Him in all the good pastures of the mountains of Israel. 'We see not yet all things put under Him,' but we see Jesus and that is enough.

III. The warrant for our highest expectations in the everlasting covenant.

Space will not allow of my entering upon the question as to the precise relation of these final words to the rest of the verse, but their relation to the great purpose of the whole verse is plain enough. It has come to be very unfashionable nowadays to talk about the covenant. People think that it is archaic, technically theological, far away from daily life, and so on and so on. I believe that Christian people would be a great deal stronger, if there were a more prominent place given in Christian meditations to the great idea that underlies that metaphor. And it is just this, that God is under obligations, taken on Him by Himself, to fulfil to a poor, trusting soul the great promises to which that soul has been drawn to cleave. He has, if I might use such a metaphor, like some monarch, given a constitution to His people. He has not left us to grope as to what His mind and purpose may be. Across the infinite ocean of possibilities, He has marked out on the chart, so to speak, the line which He will pursue. We have His word, and His word is this: 'After those days, saith the Lord, I will make a new covenant. I will write My law on their inward parts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' So the definite, distinct promise, in black and white, so to speak, to every man and woman on the face of the earth, is 'Come into the bonds of the covenant, by trusting Me, and you will get all that I have promised.'

And that covenant is, as my text says, sealed by 'the blood.' Which, being turned into less metaphorical English, is just this, that God's infinite propension of beneficence towards each of us, and desire to clothe us in garments of radiant purity, are, by Christ's death, guaranteed as extending to, and working their effects on, every soul that trusts Him. What does that death mean if it does not mean that? Why should He have died on the Cross, unless it were to take away sin?

But the blood of the covenant does not mean only the death by which the covenant is ratified. We shall much misapprehend and narrow New Testament teaching, if we suppose that. The 'blood is the life.' There is further suggested, then, by the expression, that the vital energy, with which Jesus Christ came from the dead as the Shepherd of the sheep, is the power by which God makes us 'perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

So, two practical counsels may close my words. See that you aspire as high as God's purpose concerning you, and do not be content with anything short of the, at least, incipient and progressive accomplishment in your characters and lives, of that great prayer. Again, see that you use the forces which, by the Cross and the Resurrection and the Ascension, are set in motion to make that wondrous possibility a matter-of-fact reality for each of us; and whoever you are, and whatever you have been, be sure of this, that He can lift you from the mud and cleanse you from its stains, and set you at His own right hand in the heavenly places. For the name, and the risen Shepherd, and the blood of the everlasting covenant, make a threefold cord, not to be quickly broken, and able to bear the weight of the loftiest hopes and firmest confidence that we can hang upon it.

THE GREAT PRAYER BASED ON GREAT PLEAS

Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'—HEB. xiii. 21.

MASSIVE foundations prognosticate a great building. We do not dig deep, and lay large blocks, in order to rear some flimsy structure. We have seen, in a previous sermon, how the words preceding my text bring out certain great aspects of the divine character and work, and now we have to turn to the great prayer which is based upon these. It is a prophecy as well as a prayer; for such a contemplation of what God is and does makes certain the fulfilment of the desires which the contemplation excites. Small petitions to a great God are insults. He is 'the God of peace,' therefore we may ask Him to 'make us perfect,' and be sure that He will. He is the God 'that brought again from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep,' therefore we may ask Him and be sure. He is the God who has sealed an 'everlasting covenant' with us by the blood of the Shepherd, therefore we may ask Him and be sure.

This prayer is the parting highest wish of the writer for his friends. Do *our* desires for ourselves, and for those whom we would seek to bless, run in the same mould? How strange it is that Christian people, who believe in the God whom the previous verse sets before us, so imperfectly and languidly cherish the confidence which inspires desires, for themselves and their brethren, such as those of our text this morning! Let us look at these great petitions, then, in the light of the great name on which they are based.

I. And, first, I ask you to consider the prayer which the name excites.

'Make you perfect in every good work.' Now, I need only observe here, in regard to the language of the petition, that the word translated 'make perfect' is not the ordinary one employed for that idea, but a somewhat remarkable one, with a very rich and pregnant variety of significance. For instance, it is employed to describe the action of the fisherman apostles in *mending* their nets. It is employed to describe the divine action which 'by faith we understand' when He '*made* the worlds.' It is employed to describe the action which the Apostle commends to one of his churches when he bids them '*restore* such an one in the spirit of meekness.' It is the condition which he described when he desired another of his churches to be 'perfectly *joined together*, in one mind and in one judgment.' It is still again the expression employed when he speaks of '*filling up*,' or 'perfecting that which is lacking in their faith.' The general idea of the word, then, is to make sound, or fit, or complete, by *restoring*, by *mending*, by *filling up* what is lacking, and by *adapting* all together in harmonious cooperation. And so this is what Christians ought to look for, and to desire as being the will of God concerning them. The writer goes on to still further deepen the idea when he says, 'make you perfect in every good work': where the word *work* is a supplement, and unnecessarily limits the idea of the text. For that applies much rather to character than to work, and the 'make you perfect in every good' refers rather to an inward process than to any outward manifestation. And this character, thus harmonised, corrected, restored, filled up where it is lacking, and that in regard of all manner of good—'whatsoever things are fair, and lovely, and of good report'—that character is 'well-pleasing to God.'

So, brethren, you see the width of the hopes—ay! of the confidence—that you and I ought to cherish. We should expect that all the discord of our nature shall be changed into a harmonious co-operation of all its parts towards one great end. We bear about within us a warning anarchy and tumultuous chaos, where solid and fluid, warm and cold, light and dark, calm and storm, contend. Is there any power that can harmonise this divided nature of ours, where lusts and passions, and inclinations of all sorts, drag one away, and duty draws another, so as that a man is torn apart as it were by wild horses? There is one. 'The worlds' were harmonised, adapted, and framed together, and chaos turned into order and beauty, and the God of Peace will come and do that for us, if we will let Him, so that the long schism which affects our natures, and makes us say sometimes, 'I find a law in my members warring against the law of my mind.' 'Oh! wretched man that I am; who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' may be changed into perfect harmony, and the 'bear shall eat straw like the ox, and the lion shall lie down with the lamb; and a little child shall lead them'—the meekness of a patient love bridling all their ravening passions. It is possible that our hearts may be united to fear His name; and that one unbroken temper of whole-spirited submission may be ours.

Again, we should expect, and desire, and strive towards the correction of all that is wrong, the mending of the nets, the restoring of the havoc wrought in legitimate occupations and by any other cause. Again, we may strive with hope and confidence towards the supply of all that is lacking. 'In every good'—an all-round completeness of excellence ought to be the hope, and the aim, as well as the prayer, of every Christian. Of course our various perfectings will be various. 'Star differeth from star in glory,' and the new man in many respects follows the lines of the old man, and temperament is permanent. But still, whilst all that is true, and while each shall ray back the divine light and radiance at a different angle, and so with a different hue from that which his neighbour, standing beside him, may catch and reflect, on the other hand the gospel is given to us to correct temperament, and to make the most uncongenial types of grace and excellence ours. It is meant to make it possible that men should 'gather grapes of thorns and figs of thistles'; and to correct and fill up what is wrong and what is defective in our natural dispositions, so as that the passionate man may be made meek, and the hesitating man may be made prompt, and the animal man may be sublimed into spirit, and all that is proper to my peculiar constitution and character may be curbed and limited, and much that is not congenial to it may be appropriated and made mine. We are all apt to grow one-sided Christians, and it is our business to try to make ours the things that are lacking in our faith, and to supplement, by the grace of God working in our hearts, the defects of our qualities and the failures of our disposition and temperament. Do not grow like a tree stuck in the middle of a shrubbery, which has only space to put forth branches on one side, and is all lop-sided and awry; but like some symmetrical growth out in the open, equal all round the strong bole, and rising in perfect completeness of harmonious beauty to the topmost twig that looks up to the sky. God means to make us 'perfect in every good'; to harmonise, to correct, to restore, to perfect us, that we, having all grace, may abound in all good to His glory.

Such is His purpose. Ah, brethren! has not the recognition of that as His purpose alarmingly died out of our minds; and do we live up to the height of this prayer? I would that we should all remember more, as defining our aims, and animating our courage, and directing our hopes, that 'this is the will of God, even our sanctification'; and that, when faith is dim, and effort burns low, and we are ready to put all such hopes away as a fair dream, we might be stirred to more lofty expectations, and to open our mouths wider by the thought of the 'God of peace that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the everlasting covenant'; and ask ourselves what result on us will correspond to that mighty name of the Lord.

II. And so, secondly, note the divine work which fulfils the prayer.

'Working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.' Creation, Providence and all God's works in the world are also through Jesus Christ. But the work which is spoken of here is yet greater and more wonderful than the general operations of the creating and preserving God, which also are produced and ministered through that eternal Word by whom the heavens were of old, and by whom the heavens are still, sustained and administered. There is, says my text, an actual divine operation in the inmost spirit of every believing man.

I suppose that everybody must believe that, who believes in a God having any real connection with His creatures. Surely He is not so imprisoned in His own majesty, or shut out from His own creation, by His own creation, as that He cannot touch the spirits which He has made. And surely we are not so walled up by our own separate individuality as that we cannot, if we will, open the door for Him to come in and dwell with us, and work on us. Surely if there be any reality in the gospel teaching at all there is this in it, that Christ in us, or God in Christ working in us by His divine spirit, is the crown of that hope and blessing of which Christ for us is the beginning and foundation.

I do not want men to think less of the Cross. God forbid! But I do feel, and feel growingly, that the Christianity of this generation has not a firm hold of this other aspect of Christ's work. Do not think less of what He has done, but, oh! think more of what He is doing. The perspective of our Christian faith is wrong: not that we draw the Cross too large, but that we paint the dove too small. And I would for myself and for you, dear brethren, lay this thought upon our hearts, as a far more important one than the ordinary type of Christian thinking makes it out to be—the present dwelling of God in Christ, through the divine spirit, in the hearts of all who believe, and working there that which is well-pleasing in His sight.

If that has truth, surely these things follow as our plain duty. Expect that operation! *Do* you? You Christian men and women, do you believe that God will work in your hearts? Some of you do not live as if you did. Desire it! *Do* you desire it? Do you want Him to come and clear out that stable of filth that you carry about with you? Do you wish Him to come and sift and search, and bring the candle of the Lord into the dusty corners? Do you want to get rid of what is not pleasing in His sight? Would you like Him to come and search you, 'to try you and see if'—ah, it is not an if!—'there be any wicked way in you, and lead you'—where alas! our feet are often *not* found—'in the way everlasting'? Expect it! desire it! pray for it! And when you have got it, see that you profit by it!

God does not work by magic. The Spirit of God which cleanses men's hearts cleanses them on condition, first, of their faith; second, of their submission; and, third, of their use of His gift. If you fling yourselves into the roar of worldly life, the noise of the streets, and the whirring of the looms, and the racket of the children in the nursery, and the buzzing of temptations round about you, and the yelpings for food of your own passions, will deafen your ears so as that you will never hear the still, small voice that speaks a present God. If God dwells in us and works in us, let us yield ourselves to the workings and open our hearts to the Guest, and say, 'Into every corner, O Lord, I would that Thou wouldst go, to restore and complete.'

III. Lastly, notice the visible manifestation of this inward work.

Now the writer of our text employs the same word in the two clauses, in order to bring out the idea of a correspondence between the human and the Divine Worker. 'To *work* His will, *working* in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight.'

God works in order that you and I may work. Our action is to follow His. Practical obedience is the issue, and it is the test, of having this divine operation in our hearts. There are plenty of people who will talk largely about spiritual gifts, and almost vaunt their possession of such a divine operation. Let us bring them and ourselves to this test: Are you doing God's will in daily life in the little things? In the monotonous grind of the dusty, level road with never a turn in it, and the same thing to be done to-morrow that was done to-day, and so on for indefinite weeks and months, are you, with the spirit that freshens the monotony, doing God's will? If so, then you may believe that God is working in you. If not, it is no use talking about spiritual gifts. The test of being filled with the divine operation is that our actions shall be conformed to His will. 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.' That is a pin prick that will empty many a swollen bladder, and bring it down to its real tenuity of substance.

Action is the end of all. We get the truth, we get our souls saved, we have all the abundance and exuberance of divine revelation, we have the Cross of Jesus Christ, we have the gift of the Divine Spirit—miracles and marvels of all sorts have been done for the one purpose, to make us able to do what is right in God's sight, and to do it because it is His will.

This practical obedience to God's will is the perfection of human conduct. And, on the other hand, a man who does good things without reference to the highest—viz., the will of God—in the doing of them, lacks the fine gold that gilds his deed; and the violet of his virtue is scentless. A good thing may be done without reference to God—good from the point of view of morality and the self-sacrifice and generosity that are embodied in it. But no good thing reaches its supremest goodness unless it be an act of conscious obedience to God's will.

And this doing of the will of God is perfect blessedness. All things are right for us if we submit to the will of our Father. No storms can blow us out of our course then. 'Thou shalt make a league with the beasts of the field, and the stones of the field shall be at peace with thee,' for all creatures being God's servants, are in covenant with him who does the will of the Lord.

And how are we to do it, brother? The world says, 'cultivate your own nature; correct your faults; strive to fill up your deficiencies.' Christ says, 'Cast away yourselves; and trust to Me; and I will give you new life, and a new spirit. Cultivate that!' If we are to do God's will we must have the spirit of Him who said, 'I come to do Thy will, O Lord; and Thy law is within My heart.' Let us open our hearts to Him; let us seek for Him to enter in. And then, 'the God of peace, that brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, shall make us perfect in every good; to do His will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ.'

GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES

PATIENCE AND HER WORK

'Let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.'—JAMES i. 4.

IT does not appear from the rest of this letter that the persons to whom it was addressed were under the pressure of any particular trouble or affliction. Seeing that they are 'the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,' the width of that superscription makes it improbable that the recipients were undergoing any common experience. It is the more noteworthy, therefore, that at the very outset James gives this exhortation bearing upon trials and troubles. Clearly it is not, as we often take it to be, a counsel only for the sorrowful, or an address only to a certain class of persons, but it is a general exhortation applicable to all sorts of people in all conditions of life, and indispensable, as he goes on to say, for any progress in Christian character.

'Let patience have her perfect work' is an advice not only for sad hearts, or for those who may be bowed down under any special present trouble, but for us all. And it is the condition on which it is possible, and without which it is impossible, that any Christian man should be 'perfect and entire, wanting nothing.' So I want you to look with me, first, at what is the scope of this counsel; and then at how it can be obtained; and then why it is so important: what—how—why.

I. First, then, what is the meaning of the counsel to 'let patience have its perfect work'?

Notice that the very language of the text puts aside the common notion that patience is a passive grace. The 'patience' of my text does 'work.' It is an active thing, whether that work be the virtues that it produces, or, as is more probable, its own preservation, in unbroken activity. In any case, the patience that James would have us all cultivate is an intensely active energy, and not a mere passive endurance. Of course I know that it takes a great deal of active energy to endure passively. There is a terrible strain upon the nerves in lying still on the operating-table without wincing, and letting the surgeon's knife cut deep without shrinking or screaming. There is much force that goes to standing motionless when the wind is blowing. But, for all that, the mere bearing of trouble by no means covers the whole ground of this royal and supreme virtue to which my text is here exhorting us. For, as I have often had occasion to say, the conception of 'patience' in the New Testament includes, indeed, that which is generally supposed to be its sole signification—viz., bearing unresistingly and unmurmuring, and with the full consent of a yielding will, whatever pains, sorrows, losses, troubles, or disappointments may come into our lives, but it includes more than that. It is the fixed determination to 'bate not one jot of heart or hope, but still bear up, and steer right onwards,' in spite of all hindrances and antagonisms which may storm against us. It is perseverance in the teeth of the wind, and not merely keeping our place in spite of it, that James exhorts us to here. The ship that lies at anchor, with a strong cable and a firm grip of the flukes in a good holding-ground, and rides out any storm without stirring one fathom's length from its place, exhibits one form of this perseverance, that is patience. The ship with sails wisely set, and a firm hand at the tiller, and a keen eye on the compass, that uses the utmost blast to bear it nearer its desired haven, and never yaws one hairbreadth from the course that is marked out for it, exhibits the other and the higher form. And that is the kind of thing that the Apostle is here recommending to us—not merely passive endurance, but a brave, active perseverance in spite of antagonisms, in the course that conscience, illuminated by God, has bidden us to run.

And if you want instances of it I will give you two 'He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.' All through Christ's life the shadow of the Cross closed His view; and, unfaltering, unswerving, unresting, unreluctant, He measured every step of the path, and was turned aside by nothing; because 'for that hour He came into the world,' and could not blench because He loved.

I will give you another, lower, and yet like, caught from and kindled by, the supreme example of persistence in duty. 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I might finish my course with joy.' The Apostle, who was warned on all sides by voices of prophets, and by tears and by supplications of friends, had his path clearly marked out for him, by his own conscience responsive to the will of God. And that path, whatsoever happened, he was resolved to tread. And that is the temper that my text commands us all to cultivate.

Beautiful and hard as bearing sorrows rightly may be, that is only a little corner of the grace that my text enjoins.

And so, dear friends, will you let me put the two or three words more that I have to say about this matter into the shape of counsel, not for the sake of dictating, but for the sake of giving point to my words? I would say, then, to every man, bear unmurmuring the burdens and sorrows that each of you have to bear. There are some of us, no doubt, who have some special grief lying at our hearts. There are many of us, I doubt not, who know what it is to have for all the rest of our lives a wound that never can be healed, to carry a weight that never can be lessened, and to walk in a darkness that never can be lightened. Irremediable losses and sorrows are the portion of some of my hearers. Let patience have her 'perfect work'; and bow, bow to that supreme and loving will.

But, beyond that, do not let all your effort and energy be swallowed up in rightly enduring what you may have to endure. There are many of us who make some disappointment, some loss, some grief, the excuse for shirking plain duty. There is nothing more selfish than sorrow, and there is nothing more absorbing, unless we guard against its tendency to monopolise. Work! Work for others, work for God is our best comforter next to the presence of God's Divine Spirit. There is nothing that so lightens the weight of a lifelong sorrow as to make it the stimulus to a lifelong devotion; and if our patience has its perfect work it will not make us sit with folded hands, weeping for the days that are no more, but it will drive us into heroic and energetic service, in the midst of which there will come some shadow of consolation or, at least, some blessed oblivion of sorrow.

Again, I would say, on the wider view of the meaning of this great exhortation, let no antagonism or opposition of any sort come between us and the plain path of Christian service and duty. And remember that the patience of my text has to be applied, not only in reference to the unswerving prosecution of the course which God and our own consciences dictate to us in the face of difficulties, sorrows, and losses, but also to the unswerving prosecution of that same path in the face of the opposite things—earthly delights and pleasures, and the seductions of the world, as well as the darknesses and sorrows of the world. He that lets his endurance have its perfect work will scorn delights as well as subdue sorrows. The clouds darken, but the sun dazzles. It is not only the rocks that threaten Ulysses and his crew, the sirens sit upon their island home, with their harps of gold, and trill their sweet songs, and no man understands what Christian endurance is who has not learned that he has to 'endure' in the face of joys as well as in the face of sorrows, and that persistence in the Christian course means that we shall spurn the one and turn our backs upon the other when either of them threaten to draw us aside from the path.

I might gather all that I have to say about this great queenly virtue of perseverance in the face of antagonisms into the one word of the Apostle, 'I count them but dung that I may win Christ.' 'Forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark.' 'Let patience have her perfect work.'

II. And now, secondly, a word as to how this precept may best be carried out.

It is a precept. The perfecting of Christian endurance is not a thing that comes without effort. And so the Apostle puts it into the shape of an exhortation or an injunction. He does not specify methods, but I may venture to do so, in a few sentences.

And I put first and foremost here, as in all regions of Christian excellence and effort, the one specific which makes men like the Master—keeping near Him. As the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it, 'consider' (by way of comparison) Him that endured, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. 'Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.'

Oh, brethren! there is nothing that sucks the brightness out of earthly joys when they threaten to interrupt our course, and dazzle our eyes, like turning our attention to Christ, and looking at Him. And there is nothing that takes the poison-sting, and the irritation consequent on it, out of earthly sorrows like remembering the 'Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' Am I to grumble when I think of Him? Shall I make a moan and a mourning for my sorrows when I remember His? Am I to say, 'O Lord! Thou hast given me as much as I can manage in bearing this terrible blow which Thou hast aimed at me, without repining against Thee. I cannot do any work because I have got so much to bear'? Are we to say that when we remember how He counted not His life dear to Himself, and bore all, and did all, that He might accomplish the Father's will? Do not let us magnify our griefs, but measure them by the side of Christ's. Do not let us yield to our impatience, but rather let us think of Him. Consider Him, and patience will have her perfect work.

Again, let me say, if we would possess in its highest degree this indispensable grace of persistent determination to pursue the Christian course in spite of all antagonisms, we must cultivate the habit of thinking of life, in all its vicissitudes, as mainly meant to make character. That is what the Apostle is saying in the context. He says, 'Brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.' That is a paradox. It bids a man to be glad because he has trouble and is sad. It seems ridiculous, but the next verse solves the paradox: 'Knowing this, that the trial of your faith worketh patience.' That is to say—if I rightly understand the meaning of this world in its bearing on myself, the intention of my whole life to make me what God would have me to be, then I shall not measure things by their capacity to delight and please taste, ambitions, desires, or sense, but only by their power to mould me into His likeness. If I understand that the meanings of sorrow and joy are one, that God intends the same when He gives and when He withdraws, that the fervid suns of autumn and the biting blasts of November equally tend to the production of the harvest, that day and night come from the same cause—the revolution of the earth; if I understand that life is but the scaffolding for building character, and that, if I take out of this world, with all its fading sweets and its fleeting sadnesses, a soul enlarged, ennobled by difficulties and by gladnesses, then I shall welcome them both when they come, and neither the one nor the other will be able to deflect me from my course.

And so, lastly, about this matter, I would say bring the future into immediate connection with the present, and that will illuminate the dark places, will minimise the sorrows, will make the crooked things straight and the rough places plain, will prevent joy from being absorbing, and anxiety from being corroding, and sorrow from being monopolising, and will enable us to understand how all that is here is but preparatory and disciplinary for that great and serene future. And so the light affliction, which is but for a moment, will not be so very hard to bear; and the efforts at likeness to Jesus Christ, the consequences of which will last through eternity, will not be so very difficult to keep up; and patience, fed by contemplation of the suffering Christ, and nurtured further by consideration of the purpose of life, and stimulated by the vision of the future to which life here is but the vestibule, will have 'her perfect work.'

III. And, lastly, Why is this grace so important?

James says, with his favourite repetition of the same word, 'Let her work be perfect, that ye may be perfect.' Such endurance is indispensable to growth in Christian character.

I do not need to enter, at this stage of my sermon, on the differences between 'perfect' and 'entire.' The one describes the measure of the individual graces belonging to the man; the other describes the completeness of the assemblage of such graces. In each he is 'perfect,' and, having all that belongs to complete humanity, he is 'entire.' That is the ideal to which we have to press.

That is an ideal to which we may indefinitely approximate. There are people now—as there always have been—who are apt to substitute emotion and passivity for effort in the path of Christian perfection. I would take James's teaching. Let your perseverance have her perfect work, and by toil and by protracted effort, and by setting your teeth against all seductions, and by curbing and ruling your sorrows, you will reach the goal. God makes no man perfect without that man's diligent and continuous struggle and toil, toil, indeed, based upon faith; toil, indeed, which receives the blessing, but toil all the same.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, how, in both the narrower and the wider sense of this word, the perseverance of my text is indispensable to Christian character.

I dare say we all of us know some chronic invalid say, on whose worn face there rests a gleam like that of the Lawgiver when He came down from the mount, caused by sorrow rightly borne. If your troubles, be they great or small, do not do you good they do you harm. There is such a thing as being made obstinate, hard, more clinging to earth than before by reason of griefs. And there is such a thing as a sorrow rightly borne being the very strength of a life, and delivering it from many a sin. The alabaster sheet which is intended to be fitted into the lamp is pared very thin that the light may shine through. And God pares away much of our lives in order that through what is left there may gleam more clearly and lambently the light of an indwelling God.

There is nothing to be won in the perfecting of Christian character without our setting ourselves to it persistently, doggedly, continuously all through our lives. Brethren, be sure of this, you will never grow like Christ by mere wishing, by mere emotion, but only by continual faith, rigid self-control, and by continual struggle. And be as sure of this, you will never miss the mark if, 'forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those that are before,' you 'let patience have her perfect work,' and press towards

Him who is Himself the Author and Finisher of our patience and of our faith.

DIVINE WISDOM, AND HOW TO GET IT

'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not.'—JAMES i. 5.

'If any of you *lack.*' James has just used the same word in the previous verse, and it is to be regretted that the principle upon which our authorised translators went of varying the rendering of identical expressions, masks the repetition here. James has just been telling his brethren that their aim should be to be 'perfect and entire, *lacking* nothing.' And that thought naturally suggests the other one of how great the contrast is between that possible completeness and the actual condition of Christians in general. So he gently and courteously puts, as a hypothesis, what is only too certain a fact in those to whom he is speaking; and says, not as he might have done, '*since* you all lack,' but, with gracious forbearance, '*if* any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God.'

Now, it seems to me that, in this hypothetical exhortation there are three points to be noted, two of them being somewhat unlike what we should have looked for. One is the great deficiency in the average Christian character—*wisdom*; another is the great means of supplying it—*ask*; and the third is the great guarantee of the supply—*the giving God*, whose gifts are bestowed on all liberally and without upbraiding.

I. The great deficiency in the average Christian character— wisdom.

Now, that is not exactly what we should have expected to be named as the main thing lacking in the average Christian. If we had been asked to specify the chief defect we should probably have thought of something else than wisdom. But, if we remember who is speaking, we shall understand better what he means by this word. James is a Jew, steeped through and through in the Old Testament. We have only to recall the Book of Proverbs, and what it has to say about 'wisdom' and 'folly,' by which it means something a great deal deeper and more living than knowledge and ignorance or intellectual strength and feebleness, or practical sagacity and its opposite. That deeper conception of wisdom which bases it all on 'the fear of the Lord,' and regards it as moral and spiritual and not as merely or chiefly intellectual, pervades the whole New Testament. This Epistle is more of an echo of the earlier revelation than any other part of the New Testament, and we may be quite sure that James uses this venerable word with all the associations of its use there, and in all the solemn depth of meaning which he had learned to attach to it, on the lips of psalmists, prophets, and teachers of the true wisdom. If that were at all doubtful, it is made certain by his own subsequent description of 'wisdom.' He says that it is 'from above,' and then goes on to ascribe all manner of moral and spiritual good to its presence and working on a man. It is 'pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits.' You cannot say such glowing things about the wisdom which has its seat in the understanding only, can you? These characteristics must apply to something a great deal more august and more powerful in shaping and refining character.

What, then, does James mean by 'wisdom'? He means the sum of practical religion. With him, as with the psalmist, sin and folly are two names for the same thing, and so are religion and wisdom. He, and only he, has wisdom who knows God with a living heart-knowledge which gives a just insight into the facts of life and the bounds of right and wrong, and which regulates conduct and shapes the whole man with power far beyond that of knowledge however wide and deep, illuminating intellect however powerful. 'Knowledge' is poor and superficial in comparison with this wisdom, which may roughly be said to be equivalent to practical religion.

The use of this expression to indicate the greatest deficiency in the average Christian character, just suggests this thought, that if we had a clear, constant, certain, God-regarding insight into things as they are, we should lack little. Because, if a man habitually kept vividly before him the thought of God, and with it the true nature and obligation and blessedness of righteous, loving obedience, and the true foulness and fatalness of sin—if he saw these with the clearness and the continuity with which we may all see the things that are unseen and eternal, if he 'saw life steadily, and saw it whole,' if he saw the rottenness and the shallowness of earthly things and temptations, and if he saw the blessed issue of every God-pleasing act—why! the perfecting of conduct would be secured.

It would be an impossibility for him, with all that illumination blazing in upon him, *not* to walk in the paths of righteousness with a glad and serene heart. I do not believe that all sin is a consequence of ignorance, but I do believe that our average Christian life would be revolutionised if we each carried clear before us, and continually subjected our lives to the influence of, the certain verities of God's word.

And, brethren, I think that there is a practical direction of no small importance here, in the suggestion that the thing that we want most is clearer and more vivid conceptions of the realities of the Christian revelation, and of the facts of human life. These will act as tests, and up will start in his own shape the fiend that is whispering at our ears, when touched by the spear of this divine wisdom. So, brethren, here is our root-deficiency; therefore instead of confining ourselves to trying to cure isolated and specific faults, or to attain isolated and specific virtues, let us go deeper down, and realise that the more our whole natures are submitted to the power of God's truth, and of the realities of the future and of the present, of Time and Eternity, the nearer shall we come to being 'perfect and entire,' lacking nothing.

II. We have next to note the great means of supplying that great deficiency—'let him ask.'

That direction might at first sight strike one as being, like the specification of the thing lacking, scarcely what we should have expected. Does James say, If any of you lack 'wisdom,' let him sit down and think? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom,' let him take a course of reading? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom,' let him go to pundits and rabbis, and get it from them? No! 'If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask.' A strange apparent disconnection between the issue and the means suggested! Very strange, if *wisdom* lives only up in the head! not so strange if it has its seat in the depths of the human spirit. If you want to learn theology you have to study. If you seek to master any science you have to betake yourself to the appropriate discipline. It is of no use to pray to God to make you a good geologist, or botantist, or lawyer, or doctor, unless you also take the necessary means to become one. But if a man wants the divine wisdom, let him get down on his knees. That is the best place to secure it. 'Let him ask'; because that insight, so clear, so vivid, so constant, and so perfectly adequate for the regulation of the life, is of God. It comes to us from the Spirit of God that dwells in men's hearts.

I believe that in nothing is the ordinary type of Christian opinion amongst us, in this generation, so defective as in the obscurity into which it has pushed that truth, of the Spirit of God as actually dwelling in men's hearts. And that, I believe, is to a large extent the reason why the other truths of Christianity have so little power upon people. It is of little use to hold a Christianity which begins and ends with the fact of Christ's death on the Cross. It is of less use, no doubt, to hold a Christianity which does *not* begin with that death. But if it ends there, it is imperfect because, as the Apostle put it, our Christ, the Christ who sends wisdom to those who ask it, is the 'Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us,' and sends down His Spirit on us.

And to receive that spirit of wisdom, the one thing necessary is that we should want it. That is all. Nothing more, but nothing less. I doubt very much whether hosts of the average Christian people of this generation do want it, or would know what to do with it if they had it; or whether the gift of a heart purged from delusions, and of eyes made clear always to behold the God who is ever with us, and the real importance of the things around us, is the gift that most of us pray for most. 'If any man lack wisdom, let him ask.' It is a gift, and it is to be obtained from that Holy Spirit who dwells and works in all believers. The measure of their desire is the measure of their possession. That wisdom can be had for the asking, and is not to be won by proudly self-reliant effort.

But let us not think that any kind of 'asking' suffices to put that great gift into our hearts. The petition that avails must be sincere, intense, constant, and accompanied by corresponding conduct.

It is not dropping down on your knees for two minutes in a morning, before you hurry out to business, and scrambling over a formal petition; or praying after you have gone to bed at night, and perhaps falling asleep before you get to 'Amen.' It is not asking, and then not waiting long enough to get the answer. It is not faint and feeble desire, but one presented with continuity which is not shameless importunity, but patient persistence. It must breathe intense desire and perfect confidence in the willingness of the Giver and in the power of prayer.

If our vessels are empty or nearly so, while the stream is rolling its broad, flashing flood past our doors, if we sit shivering beside dying embers while the fire blazes high on the hearth, let us awake to recognise the tragic difference between what we might be and what we are, and let us listen to James's other word, 'Ye have not because ye ask not.' 'If any of you lack wisdom'—and, alas! how many of us do, and that how sorely!—'let him ask of God.'

III. The great guarantee that such petitions shall be answered.

James has an arrangement of words in the original which can scarcely be reproduced in an English translation, but which may be partially represented thus: 'Let him ask of the giving God.' That represents not so much the divine giving as an act, but, if I may so say, as a divine habit. It is just what the Prayer-book says, 'His nature and property is to have mercy.' He is the giving God, because He is the loving God; for love is essentially the impulse to impart itself to the beloved, and thereby to win the beloved for itself. That is the very life-breath of love, and such is the love of God. There is a *must* even for that heavenly nature. He *must* bestow. He is the 'giving'; and He is the blessed God because He is the loving and the giving God. Just as the sun cannot but pour out his rays, so the very activity of the divine nature is beneficence and self-impartation; and His joy is to grant Himself to His creature, whom He has made empty for the very purpose of giving all of Himself that the creature is capable of receiving.

But not only does James give us this great guarantee in the character of God, but he goes on to say, 'He giveth to *all* men.' I suppose that 'all' must be limited by what follows—viz., 'He gives to all who ask.'

'He gives to all men *liberally*.' That is a beautiful thought, but it is not the whole beauty of the writer's idea. The word translated 'liberally,' as many of you know, literally means 'simply, without any by-ends,' or any underlying thought of what is to be gained in return. That is the way in which God gives. People have sometimes objected to the doctrine of which the Scripture is full from beginning to end, that God is His own motive, and that His reason in all His acts is His own glory, that it teaches a kind of almighty and divine selfishness. But it is perfectly consistent with this thought of my text, that He gives simply for the benefit of the recipient, and without a thought of what may accrue to the bestower. For why does God desire His glory to be advanced in the world? For any good that it is to Him, that you and I should praise Him? Yes! good to Him in so far as love delights to be recognised. But, beyond that, none. The reason why He seeks that men should know and recognise His glory, and should praise and magnify it, is because it is their life and their blessedness to do so. He desires that all men should know Him for what He is, because to do so is to come to be what we ought to be, and what He has made us to try to be; and therein to enjoy Him for ever. So 'liberally,' 'simply,' for the sake of the poor men that He pours Himself upon, He gives.

And 'without upbraiding.' If it were not so, who of us dare ask? But He does not say when we come to Him, 'What did you do with that last gift I gave you? Were you ever thankful enough for those other benefits that you have had? What is become of all those? Go away and make a better use of what you have had before you come and ask Me for any more.' That is how we often talk to one another; and rightly enough. That is *not* how God talks to us. Time enough for upbraiding after the child has the gift in his hand! Then, as Christ did to Peter, He says, having rescued him first, 'Oh! thou of little faith; wherefore didst thou doubt?' The truest rebuke of our misuse of His benefits, of our faithlessness to His character, and of the poverty of our askings, is the largeness of His gifts. He gives us these, and then He bids us go away, and profit by them, and, in the light of His bestowments, preach rebukes to ourselves for the poverty of our askings and our squandering of His gifts.

Oh, brethren! if we only believed that He is not an austere man, gathering where He did not straw, and reaping where He did not sow, but a 'giving God!' If we only believed that He gives simply because He loves us and that we need never fear our unworthiness will limit or restrain His bestowments, what mountains of misconception of the divine character would be rolled away from many hearts! What thick obscuration of clouds would be swept clean from between us and the sun! We do not half enough realise that He is the 'giving God.' Therefore, our prayers are poor, and our askings troubled and faint, and our gifts to Him are grudging and few, and our wisdom woefully lacking.

THE CROWN

'. . . The crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him.'
—JAMES i. 12.

MY purpose is to bring out the elements of the blessed life here, by grouping together those New Testament passages which represent the future reward under the metaphor of the 'crown,' and so to gain, if not a complete, at all events a comprehensive view of the elements of the blessedness of the perfected life hereafter.

These passages are numerous. Paul speaks of 'the incorruptible crown,' the reward of the victorious athlete, and of 'the crown of righteousness,' the anticipation of which soothed and elevated his last solitary hours. Peter speaks of the 'crown of glory,' the reward of the faithful elders. James speaks in my text of the 'crown of life' which the man wins who is proved by trial and stands the proof. The martyr

Church at Smyrna is encouraged to faithfulness 'unto death' by the promise of the 'crown of life' from the hands of the Lord of life. The angel of the Church at Philadelphia is stimulated to 'hold fast what thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' The elders 'cast their crowns before the throne.' If we throw all these passages together, and study their combined effect, we shall, I think, get some helpful and stimulating thoughts.

I. I ask you, then, first to look with me at the general idea conveyed by the symbol.

Now the word which is employed in the passages to which we have referred is not that which usually denotes a kingly crown, but that which indicates the garland or wreath or chaplet of festivity and victory. A twist of myrtle or parsley or pine was twined round the brows of the athlete flushed with effort and victory. The laurel is the 'meed of mighty conquerors.' Roses, with violets or ivy, sat upon the brows of revellers. And it is thoughts of these rather than of the kingly tiara which is in the mind of the New Testament writers; though the latter, as we shall see, has also to be included.

So we get three general ideals on which I touch very lightly, as conveyed by the emblem.

The first is that of victory recognised and publicly honoured. So Paul uses the symbol in this sense in both the instances of its occurrence to which we have already referred, the reward of the racer or athlete in the *palæstrum*, and the 'crown of righteousness' which was to follow his having 'fought the good fight, and finished his course.' That implies that the present is the wrestling ground, and that the issues of the present lie beyond the present. We do not look for flowers on the hard-beaten soil of the arena; and the time of conflict is no time for seeking for delights. If the crown be yonder, then here must be the struggle; and it must be our task 'to scorn delights and live laborious days' if we are ever to find that blessed result and reward of life here. We have, then, the general idea of victory recognised and publicly honoured by the tumult of acclaim of the surrounding spectators. 'I will confess His name before the angels of God.'

Then there is the other general idea of festal gladness. That, I suppose, is what was present particularly to Peter's mind when he talked about 'the wreath that fadeth not away.' I think that there is in his words a probable reference to a striking Old Testament passage, in which the prophet takes the drooping flowers on the foreheads of the drunkards of Samaria at their feast as an emblem of the swift fading of their delights, and of the impending destruction of their polity. But, says Peter, this wreath fades never. The flowers of heaven do not droop. It is an emblem of the calm and permanent delights which come to those behind whom is change with its sadness, and before whom stretches progress with its blessedness. Festal gladness, society, and the satisfaction of all desires are included in the meaning of the wreathed amaranthine flowers that twine round immortal brows.

But the usage in the Book of the Apocalypse stands upon a somewhat different footing. There are no Gentile images there. We hear nothing about Grecian games and heathen wrestlings in that book; but all moves within the circle of Jewish thought. That the word which is employed for 'the crown,' though it usually meant the victors' and the feasters' chaplet, sometimes also meant the king's crown of sovereignty, is obvious from one or two of its uses in Scripture. For the 'crown of thorns' was a mockery of royalty, and the 'golden crowns' which the elders wear in the vision are associated with the thrones upon which they sit, as emblems, not of festal gladness or of triumphant emergence from the struggles and toils of life, but as symbols of royalty and dominion. The characteristic note of the promises of the Revelation is that of Christ's servants' participation in the royalty of their Lord. So to the other two general ideas which I have deduced from the symbol we must add for completeness this third one, that it shadows, in some of the instances of its use at all events, though by no means in all, the royalty so mysterious, by which every one of Christ's 'brethren is like the children of a king,' and all are so closely united to Him that they participate in His dominion over all creatures and things. Dominion over self, dominion over the universe, a rule mysterious and ineffable which is also service, cheerful and continuous, are contained in the emblem.

So these three general ideas, victory, festal gladness and abundance, royalty and sovereignty, are taught us by this symbol of the crown.

II. Now, secondly, note more particularly the constituent parts of that chaplet of blessedness.

There are two phrases as to these, amongst the passages with which we are now concerned. St. James and the Book of Revelation speak of the 'crown of life,' and Peter speaks of the 'crown of glory.' That is to say, the material of which the garland is composed is no perishable pine or myrtle, but it is woven, as it were, of 'life' on the one hand, of glory on the other. Or, if we do not venture upon such a violent metaphor as that, we can at least say that the crown *is* life and glory.

Now, as to the first of these—what dim and great thoughts are taught us in it! 'Life,' in the New Testament, does not mean bare existence, but in its highest sense pure and blessed existence in union with God. And such life—full, perfect, continual—is regarded as being in itself the crown and reward of faithful Christian living here below. In our experience life is often a burden, a weariness, a care. If it be a crown, it is a crown of thorns. But yonder, to live will be blessedness; being will be well-being. The reward of heaven will simply be the fact of living in God. Here life comes painfully trickling, as it were, in single drops through a narrow rift in the rock; yonder it will spread a broad bosom, flashing beneath the sunshine. Here the plant grows strugglingly in some dusty cleft, amidst uncongenial surroundings, and with only occasional gleams of sunlight; its leaves are small, its stem feeble, its blossoms pallid; yonder it will be rooted in rich soil and shone upon by an unclouded sun, and will burst into flowers and forms of beauty that we know nothing of here. Life is the crown.

Then it is a crown of glory. What is glory? The splendour of God's character manifested to His creatures and become the object of their admiration. That is the full meaning of glory in the Old and in the New Testament. And all that is transferred to those who cleave to Him here and are perfected yonder. There will be complete perfection of nature. 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' The inmost and deepest beauty of redeemed and perfected souls will then be capable of being manifested fully. Here it struggles for expression, and what we seem to be, though it is often better, is just as often much worse than we really are. But there we shall be able to show ourselves as what in our deepest hearts we are. For the servants who, girt with priestly vestments, do Him sacerdotal service in the highest temple, have His name blazing upon their foreheads, and shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. The redeemed souls, transmuted into the likeness of the Lord, and made visible in the flashing splendour of their gentle radiance, shall be beheld with the wonder with which all other creatures gaze on Him who is the Lord and Source of their purity, and 'if so be that we suffer with Him, we shall be also glorified together.'

But why speak of what we know as little about as the unborn child does of the world, or the caterpillar of its future life when winged and painted and basking in the sunshine? Let us bow before the ignorance which is the prophecy and pledge of the transcendent greatness that lies behind the veil, and say, 'It is enough for the servant that he be as his Lord.'

III. Now, thirdly, note the conditions of the crown.

These are variously put with a rich variety. Paul speaks, as you remember, of 'the crown of righteousness,' by which he means to imply that on impure brows it can never sit, and that, if it could, it would be there a crown of poisoned thorns. None but the righteous can wear it. That is the first and prime indispensable condition. But then there are others stated in the other passages to which we have referred. The wrestler must 'strive lawfully,' according to the rules of the arena, if he is to be crowned. The man that is tried must 'endure his temptation,' and come out of it 'proved' thereby, as gold is tried by the fire. The martyr must be willing to die, if need be, for fidelity to his Master. We must 'hold fast that which we have' if we are ever to win that which, as yet, we have not, even the crown that ought to be ours, and so is by anticipation called ours.

But two of the passages to which I have referred add yet another kind of condition and requirement. Paul says, 'Not to me only, but to all them also that *love* His appearing'; and James here says that the man who is tried will receive the crown 'which the Lord hath promised to them that *love* Him.' So it is not difficult to make out the sequence of these several conditions. Fundamental to all is love to Jesus Christ. That is the beginning of everything. Then, built upon that, for His dear sake, the manful wrestling with temptations and with difficulties, long-breathed running, and continual aspiration after the things that are before, fidelity, if need be, unto death, and a grim tenacity of grasp of the truth and the blessings already bestowed. These things are needed. And then as the result of the love that grasps Christ with hooks of flesh, which are stronger than hooks of steel, and will not let Him go, and as the result of the efforts and struggles and discipline which flow from that love to Him, there must be a righteousness which conforms to His image and is the gift of His indwelling Spirit. These are the conditions on which the crown may be ours.

Such righteousness may be imperfect here upon earth, and when we look upon ourselves we may feel as if there were nothing in us that deserves, or that even can bear, the crown to be laid upon our brows. But if the process have been begun here by love and struggling, and reception of His grace, death will perfect it. But death will not begin it if it have not been commenced in life. We may hope that if we have our faces set towards the Lord, and our poor imperfect steps have been stumbling towards Him through all the confusions and mists of flesh and sense, our course will be wonderfully straightened and accelerated when we 'shuffle off this mortal coil.' But there is no sanctifying in death for a man who is not a Christian whilst he lives, and the crown will only come to those whose righteousness began with repentance, and was made complete by passing through the dark valley of death.

IV. Lastly, note the giver of the crown.

'Which the Lord hath promised,' 'which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me in that day.' 'I will give him a crown of life.' So Jesus Christ, as Judge, as Brother, as Distributer of the eternal conditions of men, as indwelling in us and making us sharers of all that is His, bestows upon His servants the crown. Yet, let us remember that He does not give it in such a fashion as that the gift may be taken once for all and worn thereafter, independent of Him. It must be a continual communication, all through eternal ages, and right on into the abysses of celestial glories—a continual communication from His ever-opened hand. The energy of a present Christ bestowing at the moment (if there be moments in that dim future) is the condition of the crown's continued gleaming on brows that have worn it for ages, to which geological periods are but as the beat of a pendulum. Like the rainbow that continues permanently above the cateract, and yet at each moment is fed by new spray from the stream, so the crown upon our heads will be the consequence of the continual influx into redeemed souls of the very life of Christ Himself.

So, dear brethren, all ends as all begins, with cleaving to Him, and drawing from His fulness grace whilst we need grace, and glory when we are fit for glory. Strength for the conflict and the reward of the victory come from the same hand, and are ours on the same conditions. He who covers our heads in the day of battle is He who wreathes the garland on the conqueror's brow and keeps its flowers unfading through eternal ages. 'On His head are many crowns,' which He bestows upon His followers, and all the heaven of His servants is their share in His heaven. If, then, we love Him, if for His dear sake we manfully strive in the conflict, patiently accept the ministry of trial, discipline ourselves as athletes are willing to do for a poor parsley wreath, hold fast that which we have, and by faith, effort, and prayer, receive of His righteousness here, then the grave will be but as the dressing-room where we shall put off our soiled raiment and on our white robe; and thus apparelled, even we, unworthy, shall hear from Him, 'I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'

'FIRST-FRUITS OF HIS CREATURES'

'. . . That we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.'—JAMES i. 18.

ACCORDING to the Levitical ceremonial, the first sheaf of the new crop, accompanied with sacrifice, was presented in the Temple on the day after the Passover Sabbath. No part of the harvest was permitted to be used for food until after this acknowledgment, that all had come from God and belonged to Him. A similar law applied to the first-born of men and of cattle. Both were regarded as in a special sense consecrated to and belonging to God.

Now, in the New Testament, both these ideas of 'the first-born' and 'the first-fruits,' which run as you see parallel in some important aspects, are transferred to Jesus Christ. He is 'become the first-fruits of them that slept'; and it was no mere accidental coincidence that, in this character, He rose from the dead on the day on which, according to the law, the sheaf was to be presented in the Temple. In His case the ideas attached to the expression are not only that of consecration, but that of being the first of a series, which owes its existence to Him. He makes men 'the many brethren,' of whom He is 'the first-born'; and He, by the overflowing power of His life, raises from the dead the whole harvest of which He is the first-fruits.

Then that which Jesus Christ is, primarily and originally, all those who love Him and trust Him are secondarily and by derivation from Himself. Thus, both these phrases are further transferred in the New Testament to Christian people. They are the 'first-fruits unto God and the Lamb'; or, as my text has it here, with a qualifying word, 'a *kind* of first-fruits'; which expresses at once a metaphor and the derivation of the character. They are also 'the Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.'

So, then, in this text we have contained some great ideas as to God's purpose in drawing us to Himself. And I want you to look at these for a moment or two.

I. First, then, God's purpose for Christians is that they should be consecrated to Him.

The sheaf was presented before God in the symbolical ceremonial, as an acknowledgment of His ownership of it, and of all the wide-waving harvest. It thereby became His in a special sense. In like manner, the purpose of God in bestowing on us the wondrous gift of a regeneration and new life by the word is that we should be His, yielding to Him the life which He gives, and all that we are, in thankful recognition and joyful consecration.

We hear a great deal about consecration in these days. Let us understand what consecration means. There is an inward and an outward aspect of it. In the inward aspect it means an entire devotion of myself, down to the very roots of my being, to God as Lord and Owner.

Man's natural tendency is to make himself his own centre, to live for self and by self. And the whole purpose of the gospel is to decentralise him and to give him a new centre, even God, for whom, and by whom, and with whom, and in whom the Christian man is destined, by his very calling, to live.

Now, how can an inward devotion and consecration of myself be possible? Only by one way, and that is by the way of love that delights to give. The yielding of the human spirit to the divine is only accomplished through that sweet medium of love. Self-surrender is the giving up of self at the bidding of love to Him to whom my heart cleaves.

The will will yield itself. There will be no murmuring at hard providences; no regrets darkening a whole life and paralysing duty, and blinding to blessings, by reason of the greatest sorrow which He may have sent. The will will yield in submission; the will will yield in obedience. According to the dreadful metaphor of the founder of the Jesuits—dreadful when applied to the relations of a man to a man, but blessed when applied to the relation of a man to God, and of God to man—I shall be in His hands 'like a staff' in the hand of a man, only to be used as He desires.

Consecration means self-surrender; and the fortress of self is in the will, and the way of self-surrender is the flowery path of love.

To take the other metaphor of Scripture, by which the same idea is expressed—the consecration which we owe to God, and which is His design in all His dealings with us in the gospel, will be like that of a priestly offering of sacrifice, and the sacrifice is ourselves.

So much for the inward; what about the outward? All capacities, opportunities, possessions, are to be yielded up to Him as utterly as Christ has yielded Himself to us. We are to live for Him and work for Him; and set, as our prime object, conspicuously and constantly before us, and to be reached towards through all the trivialities of daily duty, and the common-places of recurring tasks, the one thing, to glorify God and to please Him. Consecration means the utter giving of myself away, in the inmost sanctuary of the spirit. And it means the resolute devotion of all that I have and all that I am in the outgoings of daily life to His service and to His praise.

That is what God meant for you and me when He made us Christians; that was His design when He sent His Son. And we thwart and counter-work Him, just in the measure in which we still make ourselves our own centre, our wills our own law, and our well-being our own aim.

Now, remember, such consecration is salvation. For the opposite thing, the living to self, is damnation and hell and destruction. And whosoever is thus consecrated to God is in process of being saved. The relation between the two ideas is not, as it often is put, that you are to be saved that you may be consecrated; but, you are being saved in being consecrated. And the measure in which we have ceased to be devoted to ourselves, and are devoted to Him, is the accurate measure in which we have received the true salvation that is in Jesus Christ.

That consecration is blessedness. There is no joy of which a human spirit is capable that is as lofty, as rare and exquisite, as sweet and lasting, as the joy of giving itself away to Him who has given Himself for us. And such consecration is the true possession of what we give, and the only way of really owning ourselves or our possessions. 'He that loveth himself shall lose himself,' and he that gives himself away to God, a weak, sinful man, gets himself back from God, a hero, strong, and a saint.

Such consecration, which is the root of all blessedness, and the true way of entering into the possession of all possessions, is only possessible in the degree in which we subject ourselves to the influence of these mighty acts which God has done in order to secure it. Our yielding of ourselves to Him is only possible when we are quite sure that He has given Himself to us. Our love which melts us, and bows us in willing, joyful surrender, can only be the echo of His love. The pattern is set us in the Christ, and set us that we may imitate it, and we imitate it in the measure in which we lie exposed to its mighty power. 'He gave Himself for us, that He might purchase for Himself a people for His possession.' My surrender is but the echo of the thunder of His; my surrender is but the flash on the polished mirror which gives back the sunbeam that smites it. We yield ourselves to God, when we realise that Christ has given Himself for us.

Christian men and women, behold your destiny! God's purpose concerning you is that you might be not your own, because you are bought with a price. And measure against that mighty purpose the halting obedience, the reluctant wills, the half-and-half surrender which is no surrender at all, which make up the lives of the average Christians among us, and see whether any of us can feel that the divine purpose is accomplished in us, or that we have paid what we owe to our God.

II. Secondly, my text suggests that God's purpose for Christians is that they should be specimens and beginnings of a great harvest.

The sheaf that was carried into the Temple showed what sun and rain and the sweet skyey influences had been able to do on a foot or two of ground, and it prophesied of the acres of golden grain that would one day be garnered in the barns. And so, Christian men and women to-day, and even more eminently at that time when this letter was written, are meant to be the first small example of a great harvest that is to follow. The design that God had in view in our being Christianised is that we should stand here as specimens of what He means the world to be, and as witnesses of what He, by the gospel, is able to make men.

If we strip that thought of its metaphor it just comes to this, that if Christianity has been able to take one man, pick him out of the mud and mire of sense and self, and turn him into a partially and increasingly consecrated servant of God, it can do that for anybody.

The little sheaf, though there be but a handful of nodding heads in it, is a sure pledge of the harvest on the great prairie yonder, as yet untilled and unsown, which will yet bear like fruit to His praise and honour.

'We have all of us one human heart.' Whatever may be men's idiosyncrasies or diversities of culture, of character, of condition, of climate, of chronology, they have all the same deep primary wants, and the deepest of them all is concord and fellowship with God. And the path to that is by faith in His dear Son, who has given Himself for us. If, then, that faith in one case has given to a man the satisfaction of that which all men are hungering for, whether they know it or not, and are restless and miserable till they find it, then there is document and evidence that this gospel, which can do that for the individual, can do it for the race. And so the first-fruits are the pledge and the prophecy of the harvest.

What a harvest is dimly hinted at in these words of my text; the 'first-fruits of His creatures!' That goes even wider than humanity, and stretches away out into the dim distances, concerning which we can speak with but bated breath; but at least it seems to suggest to us that, in accordance with other teaching of the New Testament, 'the whole creation' which 'groaneth and travaileth together in pain until now,' will, somehow or other, be brought into the liberty and the glory of the children of God, and, as humble waiters and attenders upon the kings who are the priests of the Most High, will participate in the power of the redemption. At all events, there seem to me to gleam dimly through such words as those of my text, the great prospects of a redeemed humanity, of a renewed earth, of a sinless universe, in which God in Christ shall be all in all.

The possibility and the certainty of that issue lie in this comparatively humble fact, that some handful of poor men have found in Jesus Christ that which their finding of it in Him manifests to them, is the *elixir vitæ* and the hope of the world.

You are meant to be specimens, exhibitions of what God intends for mankind, and of what the gospel can do for the world. Do you think, Christian men and women, that anybody, looking at you, will have a loftier idea of the possibilities of human nature, and of the potentialities of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Because if they will not, then you have thwarted your Father's design when He sent you His Son.

III. Lastly, my text suggests that God's purpose for Christians is that they should help the harvest.

That does not lie in the Levitical ceremonial of the sheaf of the first-fruits, of course. Though even there, I may remind you, that the thing presented on the altar carried in itself the possibilities of future growth, and that the wheaten ear has not only 'bread for the eater but seed for the sower,' and is the parent of another harvest. But the idea that the first-fruits are not merely first in series, but that they originate the series of which they are the first, lies in the transference of the terms and the ideas to Jesus Christ; for, as I pointed out to you in my introductory remarks, when He is called 'the first-fruits of them that slept,' it is implied that He, by His power, will wake the whole multitude of the sleepers; and when it speaks of Him as 'the first-born among many brethren,' it is implied that He, by the communication of His life, will give life, and a fraternal life, to the many brethren who will follow Him.

And so, in like manner, God's purpose in making us 'a kind of first-fruits of His creatures' is not merely our consecration and the exhibition of a specimen of His power, and the pledge and prophecy of the harvest, but it is that from us there shall come influences which shall realise the harvest of which our own Christianity is the pledge and prophecy. That is to say, all Christian men and women are Christians in order that they may make more Christians.

The capacity, the obligation, the impulse, are all given in the fact of receiving Jesus Christ for ourselves. If we have Him we *can* preach Him, if we have Him we *ought* to preach Him, if we have Him in any deep and real possession, we *must* preach Him, and His words will be like a fire in our bones, if we forbear; and we shall not be able to stay.

> 'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves.'

What do you get Christ for? To feed upon Him. Yes! But to carry the bread to all the hungry as well.

Do not say you cannot. You can talk about anything that interests you. You can speak about anything that you know. And are your lips to be always closed about Him who has given Himself for you? Do not say that you need special gifts for it. We do need special gifts for the more public and conspicuous forms of what we call preaching nowadays. But any man and any woman that has Christ in his or her heart can go to another and say, 'We have found the Messiah,' and that is the best thing to say.

You *ought* to preach Him. Capacity involves obligation. To have anything, in this world of needy men who are all knit together in the solidarity of one family—to have any anything implies that you impart it. That is the true communism of Christianity, to be applied not only to wealth but to everything, all our possessions, all our knowledge, all our influence. We get them that they may fructify through us to all; and if we keep them, we shall be sure to spoil them. The corn laid up in storehouses is gnawed by rats, and marred by weevils. If you want it to be healthy, and your own possession of it to increase, put it into your seed-basket; and 'in the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand,' and it will come back to thee, 'seed for the sower and bread for the eater.'

Now this is a matter of individual responsibility. You cannot get rid of it. Every Christian has the obligation laid upon himself, and every Christian man has some sphere in which he can discharge it, and in which, if he discharge it not, he is a dumb dog lying down and loving to slumber. Oh! I wish I could get into you tongue-tied, cowardly Christian men and women who never open your mouths to a soul for the Master's sake, this conviction, that you are thwarting God's purposes, and that the blood of souls lies at your door by reason of your guilty silence.

If you believe these things which I have been saying to you, the application follows. 'The field is the world.' And neither criticisms about missionary methods nor allegations of the superior claims of the little bit of the field round about your own doors are a sufficient vindication before God, though they may be an excuse before men, for tepid interest in, or indifference to, or lack of help of, any great missionary enterprise.

We have to sow beside all waters; and if any men in the world were ever debtors both to the Greek and to the barbarian, both to the Englishman and the foreigner, it is the members of this great nation of ours, which, 'as a nest hath gathered the riches of the nations, and there were none that peeped or muttered or moved the wing.' We are debtors to the heathen world, because whether we will or no we come into contact with heathen lands; and whether we take Bibles or not, our countrymen will take rum and gunpowder, and send men to the devil if we do not try to draw them to God. We are debtors to them in a thousand cases by injuries inflicted. We are debtors by benefits received; and we are debtors most of all because Christ died for them and for us equally.

And so, I beseech you, give us your help, and remember in giving it that 'God of His own will hath begotten us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures.'

THE PERFECT LAW AND ITS DOERS

'Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.'—JAMES i. 25.

AN old tradition tells us that James, who was probably the writer of this letter, continued in the practice of Jewish piety all his life. He was surnamed 'the Just.' He lived the life of a Nazarite. He was even admitted into the sanctuary of the Temple, and there spent so much of his time in praying for the forgiveness of the people that, in the vivid language of the old writer, his 'knees were hard and worn like a camel's.' To such a man the Gospel would naturally present itself as 'a law,' which word expressed the highest form of revelation with which he was familiar; and to him the glory of Christ's message would be that it was the perfecting of an earlier utterance, moving on the same plane as it did, but infinitely greater.

Now that, of course, is somewhat different from the point of view from which, for instance, Paul regards the relation of the Gospel and the Law. To him they are rather antitheses. He conceived mainly of the law as a system of outward observances, incapable of fulfilment, and valuable as impressing upon men the consciousness of sin.

But, though there is diversity, there is no contradiction, any more than there is between the two pictures in a stereoscope, which, united, represent one solid reality. The two men simply regard the subject from slightly different angles. Paul would have said that the gospel was the perfection of the law, as indeed he does say that by faith we do not make void, but establish, the law. And James would have said that the law, in Paul's sense, was a yoke of bondage, as indeed he does say in my text, that the gospel, in contrast with the earlier revelation, is the law of liberty.

And so the two men complement and do not contradict each other. In like manner, the earnest urging of work and insisting upon conduct, which are the keynote of this letter, are no contradiction of Paul. The one writer begins at a later point than the other. Paul is a preacher of faith, but of faith which works by love. James is the preacher of works, but of works which are the fruit of faith.

There are three things here on which I touch now. First, the perfect law; second, the doers of the perfect law; and third, the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law.

I. First, then, the perfect law.

I need not dwell further upon James's conception of the gospel as being a law; the authoritative standard and rule of human conduct. Let me remind you how, in every part of the revelation of divine truth contained in the gospel, there is a direct moral and practical bearing. No word of the New Testament is given to us only in order that we may know truth, but all in order that we may do it. Every part of it palpitates with life, and is meant to regulate conduct. There are plenty of truths of which it does not matter whether a man believes them or not, in so far as his conduct is concerned. Mathematical truth or scientific truth leaves conduct unaffected. But no man can believe the principles that are laid down in the New Testament, and the truths that are unveiled there, without their laying a masterful grip upon his life, and influencing all that he is.

And let me remind you, too, how in the very central fact of the gospel there lies the most stringent rule of life. Jesus Christ is the Pattern, and from those gentle lips which say, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments,' law sounds more imperatively than from all the thunder and trumpets of Sinai.

Let me remind you, too, how in the great act of redemption, which is the central fact of the New Testament revelation, there lies a law for conduct. God's love redeeming us is the revelation of what we ought to be, and the Cross, to which we look as the refuge from sin and condemnation, is also the pattern for the life of every believer. 'Be ye imitators of God, as dear children, and walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us.' A revelation, therefore, of which every truth, to the minutest fibre of the great web, has in it a directly practical bearing; a revelation which is all centred and focused in the life which is example because it is deliverance; a revelation, of which the vital heart is the redeeming act which sets before us the outlines of our conduct, and the model for our imitation—is a law just because it is a gospel.

Such thoughts as these are needful as a counterpoise to one-sided views which otherwise would be disastrous. God forbid that the thought of the gospel of Jesus Christ as primarily a message of reconciliation and pardon, and providing a means of escape from the frightful consequences of sin, even separation from God, should ever be put in the background! But the very ardour and intensity of man's recognition of that as the first shape which Christianity assumes to sinful men, has sometimes led, and is always in possible danger of leading, to putting all other aspects of the gospel in the background. Some of you, for instance, when a preacher talks to you about plain duties, and insists upon conduct and practical righteousness, are ready to say, 'He is not preaching the gospel.' Neither is he, if he does not present these duties and this practical righteousness as the fruits of faith, or if he presents them as the means of winning salvation. But if your conception of Christianity has not grasped it as being a stringent rule of life, you need to go to school to James, the servant of God, and do not yet understand the message of his brother Paul. The gospel is a Redemption. Yes! God be thanked; but because a Redemption, it is a Law.

Again, this thought gives the necessary counterpoise to the tendency to substitute the mere intellectual grasp of Christian truth for the practical doing of it. There will be plenty of orthodox Christians and theological professors and students who will find themselves, to their very great surprise, amongst the goats at last. Not what we believe, but what we do, is our Christianity; only the doing must be rooted in belief.

In like manner, take this vivid conception of the gospel as a law; as a counterpoise to the tendency to place religion in mere emotion and feeling. Fire is very good, but its best purpose is to get up steam which will drive the wheels of the engine. There is a vast deal of lazy selfishness masquerading under the guise of sweet and sacred devout emotion. Not what we feel, but what we do, is our Christianity.

Further, notice how this law is a perfect law. James's idea, I suppose, in that epithet, is not so much the completeness of the code, or the loftiness and absoluteness of the ideal which is set forth in the gospel, as the relation between the law and its doer. He is stating the same thought of which the Psalmist of old time had caught a glimpse. 'The law of the Lord is perfect,' because it 'converts the soul.' That is to say, the weakness of all commandment—whether it be the law of a nation, or the law of moral text-books, or the law of conscience, or of public opinion, or the like—the weakness of all positive statute is that it stands there, over against a man, and points a stony finger to the stony tables, 'Thou shalt!' 'Thou shalt not!' but stretches out no hand to help us in keeping the commandment. It simply enjoins, and so is weak; like the proclamations of some discrowned king who has no army at his back to enforce them, and which flutter as waste paper on the barn-doors, and do nothing to secure allegiance. But, says James, this law is perfect—because it is more than law, and transcends the simple function of command. It not only tells us what to do, but it gives us power to do it; and that is what men want. The world knows what it ought to do well enough. There is no need for heaven to be rent, and divine voices to come to tell men what is right and wrong; they carry an all but absolutely sufficient guide as to that within their own minds. But there is need to bring them something which shall be more than commandment, which shall be both law and power, both the exhibition of duty and the gift of capacity to discharge it.

The gospel brings power because it brings life. 'If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness had been by the law.' In the gospel that desideratum is supplied. Here is the law which vitalises and so gives power. The life which the gospel brings will unfold itself after its own nature, and so produce the obedience which the law of the gospel requires.

Therefore, says James further, this perfect law is freedom. Of course liberty is not exemption from commandment, but the harmony of will with commandment. Whosoever finds that what is his duty is his delight is enfranchised. We are set at liberty when we walk within the limits of that gospel; and they who delight to do the law are free in obedience; free from the tyranny of their own lusts, passions, inclinations; free from the domination of men and opinion and common customs and personal habits. All those bonds are burnt in the fiery furnace of love into which they pass; and where they walk transfigured and at liberty, because they keep that law. Freedom comes from the reception into the heart of the life whose motions coincide with the commandments of the gospel. Then the burden that I carry carries me, and the limits within which I am confined are the merciful fences put up on the edge of the cliff to keep the traveller from falling over and being dashed to pieces beneath.

II. Now notice, secondly, the doers of the perfect law.

James has a long prelude before he comes to the doing. Several things are required as preliminary. The first step is, 'looketh into the law.'

The word employed here is a very picturesque and striking one. Its force may be seen if I quote to you the other instances of its occurrence in the New Testament. It is employed in the accounts of the Resurrection to describe the attitude and action of Peter, John, and Mary as they 'stooped down and looked into' the empty sepulchre. In all these cases the Revised Version translates the word as I have just done, 'stooping and looking,' both acts being implied in it. It is also employed by Peter when he tells us that the 'angels desire to look into' the mysteries of Redemption, in which saying, perhaps, there may be some allusion to the silent, bending figures of the twin cherubim who, with folded wings and fixed eyes, curved themselves above the mercy-seat, and looked down upon that mystery of propitiating love. With such fixed and steadfast gaze we must contemplate the perfect law of liberty if we are ever to be doers of the same.

A second requirement is, 'and continueth.' The gaze must be, not only concentrated, but constant, if anything is to come of it. Old legends tell that the looker into a magic crystal saw nothing at first, but, as he gazed, there gradually formed themselves in the clear sphere filmy shapes, which grew firmer and more distinct until they stood plain. The raw hide dipped into the vat with tannin in it, and at once pulled out again, will never be turned into leather. Many of you do not give the motives and principles of the gospel, which you say you believe, a chance of influencing you, because so interruptedly, and spasmodically, and at such long intervals, and for so few moments, do you gaze upon them. Steadfast and continued attention is needful if we are to be 'doers of the work.'

Let me venture on two or three simple practical exhortations. Cultivate the habit, then, of contemplating the central truths of the gospel, as the condition of receiving in vigour and fulness the life which obeys the commandment. There is no mystery about the way by which that new life is given to men. James tells us here, in the immediate context, how it is. He speaks of 'God of His own will begetting us with the *word of truth*'; and of the 'engrafted word, which,' being engrafted, 'is able to save your souls.' Get that word—the principles of the gospel and the truths of revelation, which are all enshrined and incarnated in Jesus Christ—into your minds and hearts by continual, believing contemplation of it, and the new life, which is obedience, will surely spring. But if you look at the gospel of your salvation as seldom and as superficially and with as passing glances as so many of you expend upon it, no wonder that you are such weaklings as so many of you are, and that you find such a gulf between your uncircumcised inclinations and the commandment of the living God.

Cultivate this habit of reflective meditation upon the truths of the gospel as giving you the pattern of duty in a concentrated and available form. It is of no use to carry about a copy of the 'Statutes at Large' in twenty folio volumes in order to refer to it when difficulties arise and crises come. We must have something a great deal more compendious and easy of reference than that. A man's cabin-trunk must not be as big as a house, and his goods must be in a small compass for his sea voyage. We have in Jesus Christ the 'Statutes at Large,' codified and put into a form which the poorest and humblest and busiest amongst us can apply directly to the sudden emergencies and surprising contingencies of daily life, which are always sprung upon us when we do not expect them and demand instantaneous decision. We have in Christ the pattern of all conduct. But only those who have been accustomed to meditate upon Him, and on the truths that flow from His life and death, will find that the sword is ready when it is needed, and that the guide is at their side when they are in perplexity.

Cultivate the habit of meditating on the truths of the gospel, in order that the motives of conduct may be reinvigorated and strengthened. And remember that only by long and habitual abiding in the secret place of the Most High, and entertaining the thoughts of His infinite love to us, as the continual attitude of our daily life, shall we be able to respond to His love with the thankfulness which springs to obedience as a delight, and knows no joy like the joy of serving such a Friend.

These requirements being met, next comes the doing. There must precede all true doing of the law this gazing into it, steadfast and continued. We shall not obey the commandment except, first, we have received and welcomed the salvation. There must be, first, faith, and then obedience. Only he who has received the gospel in the love of it will find that the gospel is the law which regulates his conduct. 'Faith without works is dead'; works without faith are rootless flowers, or bricks hastily and incompletely huddled together without the binding straw.

But, further, the text suggests that the natural crown of all contemplation and knowledge is practical obedience. Make of all your creed deed. Let everything you believe be a principle of action too; your *credenda* translate into *agenda*. And, on the other hand, let every deed be informed by your creed, and no schism exist between what you are and what you believe.

III. Lastly, note the blessedness of the doers of the perfect law. There is an echo in the words of my text, of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount, the form in which the gospel was, perhaps, dearest to this Apostle. He uses the same word—'Blessed.'

Notice the *in*; not 'after,' not 'as a reward for,' but 'blessed *in* his deed.' It is the saying of the Psalmist over again, whose words we have already seen partly reproduced in the former portion of this text. who, in the same great psalm, says: '*In* keeping Thy commandments there is great reward.' The rewards of this law are not arbitrarily bestowed, separately from the act of obedience, by the will of the Judge, but the deeds of obedience automatically bring the blessedness. This world is not so constituted as that outward rewards certainly follow on inward goodness. Few of its prizes fall to the lot of the saints. But men are so constituted as that obedience is its own reward. There is no delight so deep and true as the delight of doing the will of Him whom we love. There is no blessedness like that of an increasing communion with God, and of the clearer perception of His will and mind which follow obedience as surely as the shadow does the sunshine. There is no blessedness like the glow of approving conscience, the reflection of the smile on Christ's face.

To have the heart in close communion with the very Fountain of all good, and the will in harmony with the will of the best Beloved; to hear the Voice that is dearest of all, ever saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it'; to feel 'a spirit in my feet' impelling me upon that road; to know that all my petty deeds are made great, and my stained offerings hallowed by the altar on which they are honoured to lie; and to be conscious of fellowship with the Friend of my soul increased by obedience; this is to taste the keenest joy and good of life, and he who is thus 'blessed in his deed' need never fear that that blessedness shall be taken away, nor sorrow though other joys be few and griefs be many.

But, remember, first believe, then work. We must begin where Paul told the Philippian gaoler to begin—'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved'—if we are to end where James leads us. Do not begin your building at the roof, but put in the foundations deep in penitence and faith. And then, let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon.

PURE WORSHIP

'Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.'—James i. 27.

This is a text which is more often quoted and used than understood. The word 'religion' has somewhat shifted its meaning from that which it bore at the time of our translation. We understand by it one of two things. For instance, when we speak of the Mohammedan or the Brahminical religion we mean the body of beliefs, principles, and ceremonies which go to make up an objective whole. When we speak of an individual's religion we generally mean, not that which he grasps, but the act, on his part, of grasping the consciousness of dependence, the attitude of reverence and aspiration and love and its consequences within. But when our translation was made the word meant rather *worship* than religion, or, to use an expression which has been recently naturalised among us, it meant the 'cult' of a God, and that mainly, though not exclusively, by ceremonials, or by oral and verbal praise and petition. Now, it is obvious that that is the meaning of the expression in my text, because otherwise you would have a patently absurd saying. If James meant by 'religion' here what we now mean by it, to say that benevolence and personal purity are religion would be just equivalent to and as absurd as saying that a mother's love is washing and feeding her child, or that anger is a flushed face and a loud voice. The feeling is one thing, the expression of it is another. The feeling is religion, the expression of it is worship. And so if you take the true meaning, not only of the original Greek, but also of the word 'religion' at the beginning of the seventeenth century, then you will understand the passage a little better than some of the people that are so often quoting it do.

For the writer is not talking about religion, but about its expression, 'worship.' And he says that 'true *worship*, pure and undefiled . . . is to visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.' He has been, in the previous verses, striking at various forms of self-deception, such as that a man should conceive himself to be all right, because he listens to the law, and then goes away and forgets it, or that a man should think himself a real worshipper, while he does not bridle his tongue, and then he states the general principle of my text—worship has for its selectest manifestation and form these two things, beneficence and purity. Now I would deal with these words and seek to point out first—

I. The noble ideal of life that is set before us here.

You observe that there are two great departments into which all the forms of individual duty are, as it were, swept. To put these into plain words, the one is beneficence, as the sum and substance of all our duties to our fellows, and the other is keeping ourselves pure, as the sum and substance of all our duties to ourselves. Now I would notice, for it strikes me as being remarkable, that duties to other people are put *first*, and duties to ourselves *second*. I do not know that there is any question of practical morality more difficult for us to settle, with full satisfaction to ourselves, than the relative proportion, in our lives, of care for ourselves, for our own culture, for our own rectification, for our own growth in grace and righteousness, and our obligations to our fellows. It is very hard for us to note how much we ought to give to the definite purpose of trying to make ourselves better, and how much we ought to give to the other purpose of forgetting ourselves, and seeking for the good of other people. But James, although he does not enter into the difficulties which clog the solution of that question for us individually, does seem to think that the first thing to be looked after is other people, and that in looking after such other people we shall be most efficiently keeping ourselves unspotted from the world. And it is so, for if we get around us, as it were, an atmosphere of sympathy, of unselfish regard, of unwearied effort for the benefit of other people, it is like the thin film or air that may surround some object, and prevent the fire from reaching it for a moment or two. We shall find that by no means the least powerful detergent to purge from us the spots of the world is an honest and thorough-going flinging of ourselves into the necessities and the sorrows of other people.

But I should like to put in a caution here. I believe that there are a great many good folk in this generation who have their hands so full of Christian work that they have no time at all for the development of their own Christian character in any other way, and that they lack an intelligent grasp of the principles of the gospel, and many things that would make their work upon other people a hundred times better, just because they are so busy helping other folk that they have no time at all to look after themselves. And so the Church as a whole to-day has, as I believe, not too much beneficent and religious machinery, for there never can be too much of that—but too much relatively to the strength of the Church to drive it. Your engine is too big for your boiler, and to this busy generation, in which 'Christian worker' has all but blotted out the conception of 'Christian thinker' and 'Christian scholar,' I believe that it needs to be preached, not so much 'Look after other people' as 'Do not forget yourself.' 'Take heed to thyself, and to thy teaching,' was good counsel for Paul's young representative, and it is good counsel for us all. 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.' 'Visit the widows and the fatherless in their affliction,' by all means; *and* 'Keep yourselves unspotted from the world.'

I suppose that it is scarcely necessary to remark that James does not mean visiting the widows and fatherless to be taken as a complete statement of our duties to others. He singles out that one form which sympathy and hopefulness will take, as a typical example of the whole class of actions in which love will express itself. Nor need I do more than say in passing that 'visiting' means more than *calling on*—namely, looking after and caring for. The sum of all Christian duties to others, then, is gathered up in hopeful and sympathetic love, and in regard to ourselves James sums them up in what looks, after all, rather an incomplete ideal: 'Keep yourselves unspotted from the world.' He does not say with any falsely ascetic twist, 'Keep yourselves out of the world.' No! He says, 'Fling yourselves into it, and when you are in the thickest of the muddy ways, see that no spots and splashes of filth come on your white garments.' That implies that it is very likely, unless we take very rigid care that contact with the external world, and with the aggregate of Godless men which makes the world, in the New Testament sense of the phrase, will infect Christian men and women with evil, even when they are going on with their works of beneficence. And I suppose we all know that that is true.

But here you get a very negative view of the sum of Christian duty. Some people preach 'culture.' James says, 'Try to keep yourselves clean.' He realises that there is something more to be done by each of us with ourselves than to develop or draw out and increase that which is in us, that there needs to be another process, and that is to get rid of a great deal that is within us. We must cease to be much of what we are before we can be that which we may be and ought to be. Slay self first that you may live. Cultivate? Yes! and crucify as well.

Nor does James think any the less nobly of the resulting self, because he says that you will form the noblest character mainly by the way of negation. I know, of course, that that is only one-sided; but do we not all know that by reason of the abounding evil around us, and the proclivities more or less dormant, but existing, to much of that evil, which are in our own hearts, we do need that the law of our life should very largely be cast in the form 'Do not.' Any man who has honestly set himself to the task of moulding his life into the likeness which God would approve, must know that to walk through the wards of an hospital and catch no infection, to stand in a dung-heap and bring away no stench nor foulness clinging to the robes, is as easy as it is to plunge into the world and catch no contagion and no pollution there.

And yet, says James, *you* have to do that. He sums up Christian duty in this negative form, that is remarkable, and he flings the whole weight and burden of it on the man himself, that is more remarkable still. And yet we have only to read the rest of the chapter to see that he is not forgetting that there must be a Divine Keeper to keep the keepers, and that we shall never keep ourselves 'unspotted' unless we trust to Him who has said 'I will keep thy feet from falling.' So we need not wonder at the emphasis that is placed on the human side of the energy that is to be put forth in order to mould men into this character. But I desire to say here what I think some tendencies of good people's opinions in this day do especially need: that we do not get cleansed, hallowed, sanctified, by faith only, but that the office of faith is to bring into our possession the power which will sanctify us if we use our own efforts. 'Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us *cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of flesh and spirit,' and not trust to faith alone to make us pure.

II. We have here, secondly, **the true and pure worship in such a life.**

I need not repeat what I have already said at the beginning of these remarks as to the true bearing of the principle laid down here. Only let me remind you that the writer is not flouting, or putting away out of court, other forms of action which are more frequently called worship. True religion, which expresses itself, according to James, most nobly in the worship of life, must express itself by all the other means which men have for expressing their inmost selves, by the worship of words, by symbolical deed, by a ceremonial as well as by the visiting of the widows and the fatherless, and the keeping oneself unspotted from the world. But what is insisted upon here is that of these two ways—both of them equally natural and equally indispensable, if there be any religion to express—in some aspects the higher and the nobler is the dumb worship of a pure and beneficent life. Now, of course, we are accustomed as Nonconformists to think that texts of this sort hit the adherents of a more elaborate, sensuous, and ceremonial form of worship than finds favour in our eyes, very hard, and sometimes to forget that they hit us quite as hard. There may be quite as real ritualists amongst Nonconformists as there are amongst Anglicans or Roman Catholics—I was going to say amongst Quakers—as amongst the adherents of any form of Christian worship. For it is not the elaboration of the form, but it is the existence of it, that tempts men to trust too much to it. And the baldest—to use a modern term of opprobrium—Nonconformist worship may be just as productive of immoral reliance upon it, on the part of those who adhere to it, as the most elaborate and sensuous ceremonial that fills a cathedral with clouds of incense, and calls upon men to worship simply by looking on at a priest performing his miracle. Dear brethren, you and I need the warning as much as anybody ever did. There are people, I have no doubt, who leave their religion in their pews, and lock it up there in the box along with their hymn books, and whose notion of religion is very little more than coming to a so-called 'place of worship' and offering up verbal prayers. There creep in insincerity, unreality, unconscious hypocrisy; there creeps in mechanical, perfunctory utterance of the words of praise, or listening to the voice of the preacher. How many of you think about the hymns you sing, and make them the expression of your own feelings? How many of you fancy that you have spent the Sunday rightly when you go to church and listen more or less attentively to what your minister may have to say to you, and then go out and live a life in flat contradiction to the prayers, and the hymns, and the readings, and the preachings in which you have nominally taken part? Oh, brethren! let us get into reality, and learn more and more than ever we have done that worship does not mean the external act, but the bowing of the spirit before God, and that amidst the many temptations to insincerity, unreality, and dead, fossil formalism, which adhere to all forms of oral and ceremonial worship, there is as much need to-day as ever there was that we should listen to him who says, 'What hath thy God required of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?' 'Lord! Lord! have we not prophesied in Thy name?' 'Depart from Me; I never knew you.'

III. And now let me say one last word as to the only possible foundation for such a life.

It is worship, it is the expression of religion, and only when it is the expression of religion will you find beneficence and purity in their highest and noblest forms. There are people that say, 'I do not understand the Psalms; they are far too rapturous and emotional for me. I do not care about Paul and his metaphysical theology. I cannot make much of John and his mysticism. Give me James. That is plain common-sense; that is good practical morality. No clouds of darkness, no fine-spun theories.' Yes, and James has for his fundamental principle that if you want morality you must begin with religion. He believes that visiting the widows and the fatherless in affliction, and keeping oneself unspotted from the world, or, in other words, the highest form of morality, is the body, of which religion is the soul.

I am not going to enter upon that thorny question of the possibility of having an independent theory of ethics without religion, but my point is this—theory or no theory, where will you get the practical power that will work the theory and bring it out of the region of theory into the region of daily life and fact? I know it is extremely narrow, extremely old-fashioned, extremely illiberal, and I believe it is profoundly true. Begin with Jesus Christ and the wish to please Him, and there is the root out of which all these self-regarding and other's regarding graces and beauties will most surely come. I have no doubt that you can make your model of a life without Christianity, though I fancy that a great deal of the model comes from the Christianity. But after you have got it, then one comes and says, 'Well! it is all very pretty—a beautiful model; do you think it will work?' If you want it to work, obtain the fire of the Holy Spirit to get up the steam and then it will work. You must begin with religion if you are to have a vigorous moral life, and your work in the world must be worship if it is to rise to the height of these two great forms of beautiful and noble life, the regard for others and the effort at purity for yourselves.

Do not run away with the perversion of this text which says, 'I do not frequent churches and chapels; that is not worship. The diffused worship of my life is what God wants.' Yes, that is what God wants. And you will be most likely to render the diffused worship of a life if you have reservoirs in the life—like Sundays, like hours of private devotion and prayer—

from which will flow—and without which I doubt there will not deeply and perennially flow the broad streams of devotion all through your days. 'Work is worship' is a monastic motto that is very frequently quoted nowadays. Well, 'it depends,' as they say. Work is worship if there is a reference to God in it. It is not worship unless there is. Brethren, begin where the New Testament begins, with faith in Jesus Christ, and you will end with a worship which harmonises the service of the lip and the service of the life. And if you do not begin so, you may flout the prayers of the Church, and look upon our gatherings together as of very little value, but I doubt extremely whether you will ever have in your life the all-present reference to God which will make common deeds worship, and I doubt whether you will ever succeed either in beneficence to others, or in keeping yourselves unspotted from the world.

FAITH IN HIS NAME

'The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.'—JAMES ii. 1.

THE rarity of the mention of Jesus in this Epistle must strike every attentive reader; but the character of the references that *are* made is equally noticeable, and puts beyond doubt that, whatever is the explanation of their fewness, lower thoughts of Jesus, or less devotion to Him than belonged to the other New Testament writers, are not the explanation. James mentions Christ unmistakably only three times. The first occasion is in his introductory salutation, where, like the other New Testament writers, he describes himself as 'the slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ'; thus linking the two names in closest union, and proffering unlimited obedience to his Master. The second case is that of my text, in which our Lord is set forth by this solemn designation, and is declared to be the object of faith. The last is in an exhortation to patience in view of the coming of the Lord to be our Judge.

So James, like Peter and Paul and John, looked to Jesus, who was probably the brother of James by birth, as being the Lord, whom it was no blasphemy nor idolatry to name in the same breath as God, and to whom the same absolute obedience was to be rendered; who was to be the object of men's unlimited trust, and who was to come again to be our Judge.

Here we have, in this remarkable utterance, four distinct designations of that Saviour, a constellation of glories gathered together; and I wish now, in a few remarks, to isolate, and gaze at the several stars—'the faith of our Lord—Jesus—Christ—the Lord of glory.'

I. Christian faith is faith in Jesus.

We often forget that that name was common, wholly undistinguished, and borne by very many of our Lord's contemporaries. It had been borne by the great soldier whom we know as Joshua; and we know that it was the name of one at least of the disciples of our Master. Its disuse after Him, both by Jew and Christian, is easily intelligible. But though He bore it with special reference to His work of saving His people from their sins, He shared it, as He shared manhood, with many another of the sons of Abraham. Of course, Jesus is the name that is usually employed in the Gospels. But when we turn to the Epistles, we find that it is comparatively rare for it to stand alone, and that in almost all the instances of its employment by itself, it brings with it the special note of pointing attention to the manhood of our Lord Jesus. Let me just gather together one or two instances which may help to elucidate this matter.

Who does not feel, for example, that when we read 'let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith,' the fact of our brother Man having trodden the same path, and being the pattern for our patience and perseverance, is tenderly laid upon our hearts? Again, when we read of sympathy as being felt to us by the great High Priest who can be 'touched with a feeling of our infirmities, even Jesus,' I think we cannot but recognise that His humanity is pressed upon our thoughts, as securing to us that we have not only the pity of a God, but the compassion of a Man, who knows by experience the bitterness of our sorrows.

In like manner we read sometimes that '*Jesus* died for us,' sometimes that '*Christ* died for us'; and, though the two forms of the statement present the same fact, they present it, so to speak, from a different angle of vision, and suggest to us different thoughts. When Paul, for example, says to us, 'If we believe that *Jesus* died and rose again,' we cannot but feel that he is pressing on us the thought of the true manhood of that Saviour who, in His death, as in His resurrection, is the Forerunner of them that believe upon Him, and whose death will be the more peaceful, and their rising the more certain, because He, who, 'forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood likewise took part of the same,' has thereby destroyed death, and delivered them from its bondage. Nor, with less emphasis, and strengthening triumphant force, do we read that this same *Jesus*, the Man who bore our nature in its fulness and is kindred to us in flesh and spirit, has risen from the dead, hath ascended up on high, and is the Forerunner, who for us, by virtue of His humanity, has entered in thither. Surely the most insensitive ear must catch the music, and the deep significance of the word which says, 'We see not yet all things put under him (*i.e.*, man), but we see *Jesus* crowned with glory and honour.'

So, then, Christian faith first lays hold of that manhood, realises the suffering and death as those of a true humanity, recognises that He bore in His nature 'all the ills that flesh is heir to,' and that His human life is a brother's pattern for ours; that, He having died, death hath no more terrors for, or dominion over, us, and that whither the Man Jesus has gone, we sinful men need never fear to enter, nor doubt that we shall enter, too.

If our faith lays hold on Jesus the Man, we shall be delivered from the misery of wasting our earthly affections on creatures that may be false, that may change, that must be feeble, and will surely die. If our faith lays hold on the Man Jesus, all the treasures of the human love, trust, and obedience, that are so often squandered, and return as pain on our deceived and wounded hearts, will find their sure, sweet, stable object in Him. Human love is sometimes false and fickle, always feeble and frail; human wisdom has its limits, and human perfection its flaws; but the Man Jesus is the perfect, the all-sufficient and unchangeable object for all the love, the trust, and the obedience that the human heart can pour out before Him.

II. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ.

The earliest Christian confession, the simplest and sufficient creed, was, Jesus is the Christ. What do we mean by that? We mean, first and plainly, that He is the realisation of the dim figure which arose, majestic and enigmatical, through the mists of a partial revelation. We mean that He is, as the word signifies etymologically, 'anointed' with the Divine Spirit, for the discharge of all the offices which, in old days, were filled by men who were fitted and designated for them by outward unction—prophet, priest, and king. We mean that He is the substance of which ancient ritual was the shadow. We mean that He is the goal to which all that former partial unveiling of the mind and will of God steadfastly pointed. This, and nothing less, is the meaning of the declaration that Jesus is the Christ; and that belief is the distinguishing mark of the faith which this Hebrew of the Hebrews, writing to Hebrews, declares to be the Christian faith.

Now I know, and I am thankful to know, that there are many men who earnestly and reverently admire and obey Jesus, but think that they have nothing to do with these old Hebrew ideas of a Christ. It is not for me to decide which individual is His follower, and which is not; but this I say, that the primitive Christian confession was precisely that Jesus was the Christ, and that I, for my part, know no reason why the terms of the confession should be altered. Ah, these old Jewish ideas are not, as one great man has called them, 'Hebrew old clothes'; and I venture to assert that they are not to be discarded without woefully marring the completeness of Christian faith.

The faith in Jesus must pass into faith in Christ; for it is the office described in that name, which gives all its virtue to the manhood. Glance back for a moment to those instances which I have already quoted of the use of the name suggesting simple humanity, and note how all of them require to be associated with this other thought of the function of Christ, and His special designation by the anointing of God, in order that their full value may be made manifest.

For instance, 'Jesus died.' Yes, that is a fact of history. The Man was crucified. What is that to me more than any other martyrdom and its story, unless it derives its significance from the clear understanding of who it was that died upon the Cross? So we can understand that significant selection of terms, when the same Apostle, whose utterances I have already been quoting in the former part of this sermon, varies the name, and says, 'This is the gospel which I declared unto you, how that *Christ* died for our sins according to the Scriptures.'

Again, suppose we think of the example of *Jesus* as the perfect realised ideal of human life. That may become, and I think often does become, as impotent and as paralysing as any other specimen without flaw, that can be conceived of or presented to man. But if we listen to the teaching that says to us, '*Christ* died for us, leaving us an example that we should follow His steps,' then the ideal is not like a cold statue that looks down repellent even in its beauty, but is a living person who reaches a hand down to us to lift us to His own level, and will put His spirit within us, that, as the Master is, so may also the servants be.

Again, if we confine ourselves to the belief that the Man named *Jesus* has risen again, and has been exalted to glory, then, as a matter of fact, the faith in His Resurrection and Ascension will not long co-exist with the rejection of anything beyond simple humanity in His person. If, however, that faith could last, then His might be conceived of as filling a solitary throne, and there might be no victory over death for the rest of us in His triumph. But when we can ring out as the Apostle did, 'Now is *Christ* risen from the dead,' then we can also say, 'and is become the first-fruits of them that slept.'

So, brethren, lift your faith in Jesus, and let it be sublimed into faith in Christ. 'Whom say ye that I am?' The answer is—may we all from our hearts and from our minds make it!—'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

III. Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ the Lord.

Now, I take it that that name is here used neither in its lowest sense as a mere designation of politeness, as we employ 'sir,' nor in its highest sense in which, referred to Jesus Christ, it is not unfrequently used in the New Testament as being equivalent to the 'Jehovah' of the Old; but that it is employed in a middle sense as expressive of dignity and sovereignty.

Jesus is Lord. Our brother, a Man, is King of the universe. The new thing in Christ's return to 'the glory which He had with the Father before the world was' is that He took the manhood with Him into indissoluble union with the divinity, and that a man is Lord. So you and I can cherish that wonderful hope: 'I will give to him that overcometh to sit with Me on My throne.' Nor need we ever fear but that all things concerning ourselves and our dear ones, and the Church and the world, will be ordered aright; for the hand that sways the universe is the hand that was many a time laid in blessing upon the sick and the maimed, and that gathered little children to His bosom.

Christ is Lord. That is to say, supreme dominion is based on suffering. Because the vesture that He wears is dipped in blood, therefore there is written upon it, 'King of kings, and Lord of lords.' The Cross has become the throne. There is the basis of all true rule, and there is the assurance that His dominion is an everlasting dominion. So our faith is to rise from earth, and, like the dying martyr, to see the Son of Man at the right hand of the majesty of the heavens.

IV. Lastly, Christian faith is faith in Jesus Christ, 'the Lord of glory.'

Now, the last words of my text have given great trouble to commentators. A great many explanations, with which I need not trouble you, have been suggested with regard to them. One old explanation has been comparatively neglected; and yet it seems to me to be the true one. 'The Lord' is a supplement which ekes out *a* meaning, but, as I think, obscures *the* meaning. Suppose we strike it out and read straight on. What do we get? 'The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.'

And is that not intelligible? Remember to whom James was writing—Jews. Did not every Jew know what the Shekinah was, the light that used to shine between the Cherubim, as the manifest symbol of the divine presence, but which had long been absent from the Temple? And when James falls back upon that familiar Hebrew expression, and recalls the vanished lustre that lay upon the mercy-seat, surely he would be understood by his Hebrew readers, and should be understood by us, as saying no more and no other than another of the New Testament writers has said with reference to the same symbolical manifestation—namely, 'The Word became flesh tabernacled among us; and we beheld His glory, the glory as the only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' James's sentence runs on precisely the same lines as other sentences of the New Testament. For instance, the Apostle Paul, in one place, speaks of 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.' And this statement is constructed in exactly the same fashion, with the last name put in opposition to the others, 'The Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.'

Now, what does that mean? This—that the true presence of God, that the true lustrous emanation from, and manifestation of, the abysmal brightness, is in Jesus Christ, 'the effulgence of His glory and the express image of His person.' For the central blaze of God's glory is God's love, and that rises to its highest degree in the name and mission of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Men conceive of the glory of the divine nature as lying in the attributes which separate it most widely from our impotent, limited, changeable, and fleeting being. God conceives of His highest glory as being in that love, of which the love of earth is a kindred spark; and whatever else there may be of majestic and magnificent in Him, the heart of the Divinity is a heart of love.

Brethren, if we would see God, our faith must grasp the Man, the Christ, the Lord, and, as climax of all names—the Incarnate God, the Eternal Word, who has come among us to reveal to us men the glory of the Lord.

So, brethren, let us make sure that the fleshy tables of our hearts are not like the mouldering stones that antiquarians dig up on some historical site, bearing half-obliterated inscriptions and fragmentary names of mighty kings of long ago, but bearing the many-syllabled Name written firm, clear, legible, complete upon them, as on some granite block from the stonecutter's chisel. Let us, whilst we cling with human love to the Man that was born in Bethlehem, discern the Christ that was prophesied from of old, to whom all altars point, of whom all prophets spoke, who was the theme end of all the earlier Revelation. Let us crown Him Lord of All in our own hearts, and let us, beholding in Him the glory of the Father, lie in His Light until we are changed into the same image. Be sure that your faith is a full-orbed faith; grasp all the many sides of the Name that is above every name. And let us, like the apostles of old, rejoice if we are counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name. Let us go forth into life for the sake of the Name, and, whatsoever we do in word or deed, let us do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Glory.

FAITH WITHOUT WORKS

'What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? 15. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16. And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? 17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. 18. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. 19. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. 20. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? 21. Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? 22. Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? 23. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God.'—James ii. 14-23.

James thrice reiterates his point in this passage, and each repetition closes a branch of his argument. In verse 17 he draws the inference from his illustration of a worthy sympathy which does nothing; in verse 20 he deduces the same conclusion from the speech put into the mouth of an imaginary speaker; in verse 24 he draws it from the life of Abraham. We shall best get hold of the scope of these verses by taking these three parts separately.

I. Now, most misconceptions of a writer's meaning are due to imperfect definition of terms. James was no metaphysician, and he does not stop to put precisely what he means by 'faith.' Clearly he meant by it the full evangelical meaning of trust when he used it in the earlier part of the letter (Jas. i. 3, 6; ii. 1-5). As clearly he here means a mere intellectual belief of religious truth, a barren orthodoxy. If that undeniable explanation of his terminology is kept steadily in view, much of the difficulty which has been found in bringing his teaching into harmony with Paul's melts away at once. There is a distinct difference of tone and point of view between the two, but they entirely agree in the worthlessness of such a 'faith,' if faith it can be called. Probably Paul would not have called it so, but James accepts the 'saying' of the man whom he is confuting, and consents to call his purely intellectual belief faith. And then he crushes it to atoms as hollow and worthless, in which process Paul would gladly have lent a hand.

We may observe that verse 14 begins with supposing the case of a mere lip 'faith,' while verse 17 widens its conclusion to include not only that, but any 'faith,' however real, which does not lead to works. The logic of the passage would, perhaps, hang better together if verse 14 had run 'if a man have faith'; but there is keen irony as well as truth in the suggestion that a faith which has no deeds often has abundant talk. The people who least live their creeds are not seldom the people who shout loudest about them. The paralysis which affects the arms does not, in these cases, interfere with the tongue. James had seen plenty of that kind of faith, both among Pharisees and Jewish Christians, and he had a holy horror of loose tongues (Jas. iii. 2-12). That kind of faith is not extinct yet, and we need to urge James's question quite as much as he did: 'Can that faith save?' Observe the emphasis on 'that' which the Revised Version rightly gives.

The homely illustration of the very tender sympathy which gushes inwards, and does nothing to clothe naked backs or fill empty stomachs, perhaps has a sting in it. Possibly the very orthodox Jewish Christians with whom James is contending were less willing to help poor brethren than were the Gentile Christians.

But, in any case, there is no denying the force of the parallel. Sympathy, like every other emotion, is meant to influence action. If it does not, what is the use of it? What is the good of getting up fire in the furnace, and making a mighty roaring of steam, if it all escapes at the waste-pipe, and drives no wheels? And what is the good of a 'faith' which only rushes out at the escape-pipe of talk? It is 'dead in itself.' Romans ii. 17-29 shows Paul's way of putting the same truth. Emotion and beliefs which do not shape conduct are worthless. Faith, if it have not works, is dead.

II. The same conclusion is arrived at by another road in verses 18-20. James introduces an imaginary speaker, who replies to the man who says that he has faith. This new interlocutor 'says' his say too. But he is not objecting, as has been sometimes thought, to James, but to the first speaker, and he is expressing James's own thought, which the Apostle does not utter in his own person, perhaps because he would avoid the appearance of boasting of his own deeds. To take this speaker as opposing James brings hopeless confusion, What does the new speaker say? He takes up the first one's assertion of having 'faith'; he will not say that he himself has it, but he challenges the other man to show his, if he can, by any other way than by exhibiting the fruits of faith, while he himself is prepared and content to be tested by the same test. That is to say, talk does not prove the possession of faith; the only possible demonstration that one has it is deeds, which are its fruits. If a man has (true) faith, it will mould his conduct. If he has nothing to produce but his bare assertion, then he cannot show it at all; and if no evidence of its existence is forthcoming, it does not exist.

Motion is the test of life. A 'faith' which does nothing, which moves no limb, is a corpse. On the other hand, if grapes grow ruddy and sweet in their clusters, there must be a vine on which they grow, though its stem and root may be unseen. 'What is bred in the bone will come out in the flesh.' True faith will be fruitful. Is not this Paul's doctrine too? Does not he speak of 'faith that worketh by love?' Is it not his principle, too, that faith is the source of conduct, the active principle of the Christian life, and that if there are no results of it in the life, there is none of it in the heart?

But the second speaker has a sharp dart of irony in his quiver (verse 13). 'You plume yourself on your monotheistic creed, do you, and you think that that is enough to make you a child of God's? Well, that is good, as far as it goes, but it does not go very far. You have companions in it, for the demons believe it still more thoroughly than you do; and, what is more, it produces more effect on them than on you. You do nothing in consequence of your belief; they "shudder" at any rate—a grim result, but one showing that their belief goes deeper than yours.' The arrow gains in point and keenness if we observe that James quotes the very words which are contained in the great profession of monotheism which was recited morning and evening by every Jew (Deut. vi. 4, etc.). James seems, in verse 20, to speak again in his own name, and to reassert his main thought as enforced by this second argument.

III. He has been arguing from the very nature of faith, and the relation between it and conduct. Now he turns to history and appeals to Abraham's case. In these verses he goes over the same ground as Paul does in Romans v., and there is a distinct verbal contradiction between verse 24 here and Romans iii. 28; but it is only verbal. Are the two apostles writing in ignorance of each other's words, or does the one refer to the other, and, if so, which is the earlier? These are interesting questions, to deal with which satisfactorily would more than exhaust our space.

No doubt the case of Abraham was a commonplace in rabbinical teaching, and both Paul and James had been accustomed to hear his history commented upon and tortured in all sorts of connections. The mere reference to the patriarch is no proof of either writer having known of the other; but the manner of it raises a presumption in that direction, and if either is referring to the other, it is easier to understand Paul if he is alluding to James, than James as alluding to Paul.

Their apparent disagreement is only apparent. For what are the 'works' to which James ascribes justifying power? Verse 22 distinctly answers the question. They are acts which spring from faith, and which in turn, as being its fruits, 'perfect' it, as a tree is perfect when it has manifested its maturity by bearing. Surely Paul's doctrine is absolutely identical with this. He too held that, on the one hand, faith creates work, and on the other, works perfect faith. The works which Paul declares are valueless, and which he calls 'the works of the law,' are not those which James asserts 'justify.' The faith which James brands as worthless is not that which Paul proclaims as the condition of justifying; the one is a mere assent to a creed, the other is a living trust in a living Person.

James points to the sacrifice of Isaac as 'justifying' Abraham, and has in mind the divine eulogium, 'Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from Me,' but he distinctly traces that transcendent act of an unquestioning devotion to the 'faith' which wrought with it, and was perfected by it. He quotes the earlier divine declaration (Gen. xv. 6) as 'fulfilled' at that later time, by which very expression is implied, not only that the root of the sacrifice was faith, but that the words were true in a yet higher sense and completer degree, when that sacrifice had 'perfected' the patriarch's faith.

The ultimate conclusion in verse 24 has to be read in the light of these considerations, and then it appears plainly that there is no contradiction in fact between the two apostles. 'The argument . . . has no bearing on St. Paul's doctrine, its purport being, in the words of John Bunyan, to insist that "at the day of doom men shall be judged according to their fruit." It will not be said then, Did you believe? but, Were you doers or talkers only?' (Mayor, *Epistle of St. James* LXXXVIII).

No doubt, the two men look at the truth from a somewhat different standpoint. The one is intensely practical, the other goes deeper. The one fixes his eye on the fruits, the other digs down to the root. To the one the flow of the river is the more prominent; to the other, the fountain from which it rises. But they supplement, and do not contradict, each other. A shrewd old Scotsman once criticised an elaborate 'Harmony' of the Gospels, by the remark that the author had 'spent a heap of pains in making four men agree that had never cast [fallen] out.' We may say the same of many laborious reconciliations of James, the urgent preacher of Christian righteousness, and Paul, the earnest proclaimer that 'a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.'

GOD'S FRIENDS

'He was called the Friend of God.'—James ii. 23.

When and by whom was he so called? There are two passages in the Old Testament in which an analogous designation is applied to the patriarch, but probably the name was one in current use amongst the people, and expressed in a summary fashion the impression that had been made by the history of Abraham's life. A sweet fate to have that as the brief record of a character, and to be known throughout the ages by such an epitaph! As many of us are aware, this name, 'the Friend,' has displaced the proper name, Abraham, on the lips of all Mohammedan people to this day; and the city of Hebron, where his corpse lies, is commonly known simply as 'the Friend.'

My object in this sermon is a very simple one. I merely wish to bring out two or three of the salient elements and characteristics of friendship as exercised on the human level, and to use these as a standard and test of our religion and relation to God.

But I may just notice, for a moment, how beautiful and blessed a thought it is which underlies this and similar representations of Scripture—viz., that the bond which unites us to God is the very same as that which most sweetly and strongly ties men to one another, and that, after all, religion is nothing more or less than the transference to Him of the emotions which make all the sweetness of human life and society.

Now, I shall try to bring out two or three points which are included in that name, 'the Friend of God,' and to ask ourselves if they apply to our relations to Him.

I. First, friends trust and love one another.

Mutual confidence is the mortar which binds the stones in society together, into a building. It makes the difference between the herding together of beasts and the association of men. No community could keep together for an hour without mutual confidence, even in regard of the least intimate relationships of life. But it is the very life-blood of friendship. You cannot say, 'A. B. is my friend, but I do not trust him.' If suspicion creeps in, like the foul malaria of tropical swamps, it kills all friendship. Therefore 'he was called the Friend of God' is by James deduced from the fact that 'he believed God, and it was imputed to him for righteousness.' You cannot make a friend of a man that you do not know where to have. There may be some vague reverence of, or abject reluctant submission to, 'the unknown God,' the something outside of ourselves that perhaps makes for righteousness; but for any vivid, warm throb of friendship there must be, first, a clear knowledge, and then a living grappling of that knowledge to my very heart, by my faith. Unless I trust God I cannot be a friend of God's. If you and I are His friends we trust Him, and He will trust us. For this friendship is not one-sided, and the name, though it may be ambiguous as to whether it means one whom I love or one who loves me, really includes both persons to the compact; and there are analogous, if not identical, emotions in each. So that, if I trust God, I may be sure that God trusts me, and, in His confidence, leaves a great deal to me; and so ennobles and glorifies me by His reliance upon me.

But whilst we know that this belief in God was the very nerve and centre of Abraham's whole character, and was the reason why he was called the friend of God, we must also remember that, as James insists upon here, it was no mere idle assent, no mere intellectual conviction that God could not tell lies, which was dignified by the name of belief, but that it was, as James insists upon in the context, a trust which proved itself to be valid, because it was continually operative in the life. 'Faith without works is dead.' 'And Abraham, our father, was he not justified by works?'

And so the Epistle to the Hebrews, if you will remember, traces up to his faith all the chief points in his life. 'By faith he went out from the land where he dwelt; by faith he dwelt in tabernacles,' in the promised land, believing that it should be his and his seed's; 'by faith' he offered up his son on the altar.

Thus we come to this, that the heavenly and the earthly friend, like friends on the low levels of humanity, love each other because they trust each other. I have said that the words 'My friend' may either mean one whom I love or one who loves me, but that the two things are in the present connection inseparable. Only let us remember where the sweet reciprocation and interchange of love begins. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' 'When we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.' And so we have to turn to that heavenly Friend, and feel that as life itself, so the love which is the life of life, has its beginning in Him, and that never would our hearts have turned themselves from their alienation, unless there had poured down upon them the attractive outflow of His great love. It was an old fancy that, wherever a tree was struck by lightning, all its tremulous foliage turned in the direction from which the bolt had come. When the merciful flash of God's great love strikes a heart, then all its tendrils turn to the source of the life-giving light, and we love back again, in sweet reverberation to the primal and original love. Dear brethren, I lay upon your heart and mine this thought, that friends trust and love each other. Do we trust and love our God?

II. Friends have frank, familiar intercourse with one another.

Let us turn to the illuminative example in our text, and remember God's frankness with Abraham. 'Shall I hide from Abraham the thing that I will do?' Let us cap that—as we can, marvellous and great as the utterance is—by another one, 'I call you not servants, but friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I declare unto you.' So much for God's frankness. What about Abraham's frankness with God? Remember how he remonstrated with Him; how he complained to Him of His dealings; how he persisted with importunity, which would have been presumptuous but for the friendship which underlay it, and warranted the bold words. And let us take the simple lesson that if we are friends and lovers of God, we shall delight in intercourse with Him. It is a strange kind of religion that does not care to be with God, that would rather think about anything else than about Him, that is all unused to quiet, solitary conversation and communion with Him, but it is the religion of, I wonder, how many of us to-day. He would be a strange friend that never crossed your threshold if you could help it; that was evidently uncomfortable in your presence, and ill at ease till he got away from you, and that when he came was struck dumb, and had not a word to say for himself, and did not know or feel that he and you had any interests or subjects in common. Is that not a good deal like the religion of hosts of professing Christians? 'He was called the friend of God,' and he never, all his days, if he could help it, thought about Him or went near Him!

If we are friends of God, we shall have no secrets from Him. There are very few of those who are dearest to us to whom we could venture to lay bare all the depths of our hearts. There are black things down in the cellars that we do not like to show to any of our friends. We receive them upstairs, in the rooms for company. But you should take God all through the house. And if there is the trust and the love that I have been speaking about, we shall not be afraid to spread out all our foulness, and our meanness, and our unworthy thoughts of, and acts towards, Him, before His 'pure eyes and perfect judgment,' and say, 'Nobody but my best friend could look at such a dungheap, but I spread it before Thee. Look at it, and Thou wilt cleanse it; look at it, and it will melt away. Look at it, and in the knowledge that Thou knowest, my knowledge of it will be less of a torment, and my bosom will be cleansed of its perilous stuff.'

Tell God all, if you mean to be a friend of His. And do not be afraid to tell Him your harsh thoughts of Him, and your complaints of Him. He never resents anything that a man who loves Him says *about* Him, if he says it *to* Him. What He resents—if I might use the word—is our huddling up grudges and murmurings and questionings in our own hearts, and saying never a word to the friend against whom they offend. Out with it all, brethren! Complaints, regrets, questionings, petitions, hot wishes, take them all to Him; and be sure that instead of their breaking, they will, if spoken, cement the friendship which is disturbed by secrecy on our parts.

If we are God's lovers, He will have no secrets from us. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant.' There is a strange wisdom and insight, sometimes amounting even to prophetic anticipation, which creeps into a simple heart that is knit closely to God. But whether the result of our friendship with Him be such communication of such kinds of insight or no, we may be sure of this, that, if we trust Him, and love Him, and are frank with Him, He will in so far be frank with us, that He will impart unto us Himself, and in the knowledge of His love we shall find all the knowledge that we need.

III. Friends delight to meet each other's wishes.

Let us go back to our story again. The humble, earthly friend of God did as God bade him, substantially all his life, from the day when he made the 'Great Refusal,' and left behind him home and kindred and all, until the day when he went up the sides of Moriah to offer there his son. Abraham met God's wishes because Abraham trusted and loved God.

And what about the Divine Friend? Did He not meet Abraham's wishes? You remember that wonderful scene, which presents, in such vivid and dramatic form, the everlasting truth that the man who bows his will to God, bows God's will to his, when he pleaded for Sodom, and won his case by persistence and importunity of lowly prayer. And these historical notices on both sides are for us the vehicles of the permanent truth that, if we are God's lovers and friends, we shall find nothing sweeter than bowing to His will and executing His commandments. As I dare say I have often said to you, the very mark and signature of love is that it delights to divine and fulfil the desires of the beloved, and that it moulds the will of each of the parties into conformity with the will of the other.

Ah, dear brethren! what a commentary our religion is upon such thoughts! To how many of us is the very notion of religion that of a prohibition of things that we would much like to do, and of commands to do things that we had much rather not do? All the slavery of abject submission, of reluctant service, is clean swept away, when we understand that friendship and love find their supreme delight in discovering and in executing the will of the beloved. And surely if you and I are the friends of God, the cold words, 'duty,' 'must,' 'should,' will be struck out of our vocabulary and will be replaced by 'delight,' 'cannot but,' 'will.' For friends find the very life—I was going to say the voice—of their friendship in mutual obedience.

And God, the heavenly Friend, will do what we wish. In that very connection did Jesus Christ put the two thoughts of friendship with Him and His executing His disciple's behests; saying in one breath, 'Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you,' and in the next, 'Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' This conformity of will, so that there is but one will in the two hearts, which is the very consummation and superlative degree of human friendship and love, applies as truly to the friendship between man and God.

IV. Friends give gifts to each other.

Let us go back to our story. What did Abraham give God? 'Forasmuch as he hath not withheld his only son from Me, I know that he fears Me.' And what does God give to His friends? 'He that spared not His own Son, but freely delivered Him up to the death for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' Abraham's gift of his son to God was but a feeble shadow of God's gift of His Son to men. And if the surrender on the part of the human friend was the infallible token of his love, surely the surrender on the part of the heavenly Friend is no less the infallible sign of His love to all the world. Generalise these thoughts and they come to this. If we are God's lovers God will give us Himself, in so far as we can receive Him; and all other gifts in so far as they are good and needful. If we are God's friends and lovers we shall give Him, in glad surrender, our whole selves. And, remember, if you feel that you have separate interests from Him, if you keep things and do not let Him say, 'These are mine'; if you grudge sacrifice, and will not hear of self-surrender, and are living lives centred in, ruled by, devoted to, self, you have little reason to call yourself a Christian. 'Ye are My friends if ye'—not only 'do whatsoever I command you,' but 'if you give yourself to Me.' Yield yourselves to God, and in the giving of yourselves to Him, you will get back yourselves glorified and blessed by the gift. There is no friendship if self shuts out the friend from participation in what is the other's. As long as 'mine' lies on this side of a high wall, and 'thine' on the other, there is but little friendship. Down with the wall, and say about everything 'Ours'; and then you have a right to say 'I am the friend of God.'

V. Lastly, and but a word. Friends stand up for each other.

'I am thy shield; fear not, Abraham,' said God, when His friend was in danger from the vengeance of the Eastern kings whom he had defeated; and all through life the same strong arm was cast around him. Abraham, on his part, had to stand up for God amidst his heathen neighbours.

If we are God's friends and lovers He will take up our cause. Be sure that if God be for us, it matters not who is against us. If we are God's friends and lovers we have to take up His cause. What would you think of a man who, in going away to a far-off country, said to some friend, 'I wish you would look after so and so for me as long as I am gone'; and the friend would say 'Yes!' and never give a thought nor lift a finger to discharge the obligation? God trusts His reputation to you Christian people; He has interests in this world that you have to look after. You have to defend Him as really as He has to defend you. And it is the dreadful contradiction of religious people's profession of religion that they often care so little, and do so little to promote the cause, to defend the name, to adorn the reputation, and to further what I may venture to call the interests, of their heavenly Friend in the world.

Dear brother, looking at these things, can you venture to say that you are a friend of God? If you cannot, what are you? Our relations to men admit of our dividing them into three—friends, enemies, nothings. We may love, we may hate, we may be absolutely indifferent and ignorant. I am afraid the three states cannot be transferred exactly to our relations to God. If not His friend, what are you? Have you only a far-off, bowing acquaintance with Him? Well, then, that is because you have neglected, if you have not spurned, His offered friendship. And, oh! how much you have lost! No human heart is a millionth part so sweet, and so capable of satisfying you as God's. All friendship here has its limits, its changes, its end. God's is boundless, immutable, eternal. All things are the friends of God's friend; and all things are arrayed against him who rejects God's friendship.

I beseech you, let Him woo you to love Him; and yield your hearts to Him. 'If when we were "enemies," we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son,' much more, being friends, all the fulness of His love and the sweetness of His heart will be poured upon us through the living Christ.

A WATCH ON THE DOOR OF THE LIPS

'My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation. 2. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. 3. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. 4. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. 5. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! 6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. 7. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: 8. But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. 9. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. 10. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. 11. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? 12. Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh. 13. Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.'—JAMES iii. 1-13.

THERE is a recurrence to earlier teaching in James i. 19, 26, which latter verse suggests the figure of the bridle. James has drunk deep into Old Testament teaching as to the solemn worth of speech, and into Christ's declaration that by their words men will be justified or condemned.

No doubt, Eastern peoples are looser tongued than we Westerns are; but modern life, with its great development of cities and its swarm of newspapers and the like, has heightened the power of spoken and printed words, and made James's exhortations even more necessary. His teaching here gathers round several images — the bridle, the fire, the untamed creature, the double fountain. We deal with these in order.

I. No doubt, in the infant Church, with its flexible organisation, there were often scenes very strange to our eyes, such as Paul hints at in 1 Corinthians xiv. 26-33, where many voices of would-be teachers contended for a hearing. James would check that unwholesome eagerness by the thought that teachers who do not practice what they preach will receive a heavier judgment than those who did not set up to be instructors. He humbly classes himself with the teachers. The 'for' of verse 2 introduces a reason for the advice in verse 1—since it is hard to avoid falls, and harder in respect to speech than action, it is a dangerous ambition to be a teacher.

That thought leads on to the series of considerations as to the government of the tongue. He who can completely keep it under command is a 'perfect' man, because the difficulty of doing so is so great that the attainment of it is a test of perfection. James is like the Hebrew prophets, in that he does not so much argue as illustrate. His natural speech is imagery, and here he pours out a stream of it. The horse's bridle and the ship's rudder may be taken together as both illustrating the two points that the tongue guides the body, and that it is intended that the man should guide the tongue. These two ideas are fused together here. The bridle is put into the mouth, and what acts on the mouth influences the direction of the horse's course. The rudder is but a little bit of wood, but its motion turns the great ship, even when driven by wild winds. 'So the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things,' which boasting is not false, for the whole point of the passage is that that little member has large power.

Is it true, as James says, that it governs our actions as the bridle does the horse, or the rudder the ship? No doubt, many sins go straight from the inner chambers of the heart's desires out into the world of action without going round by the way of speech; but still, if we think of the immense power of our own words and of others in setting our activities in motion, of the dreadful harvest of sin which has often sprung from one tempting word, of the ineffaceable traces of pollution which some vile book leaves in memory and heart, of the good and evil which have been wrought by spoken or printed words, and that never more truly than to-day, when a flood of talk all but drowns the world, we shall not think James exaggerating in the awful weight he gives to speech as the mother of action.

His other point is that this guiding power needs guidance. A firm yet gentle hand touches the rein, and the sensitive mouth yields to the light pressure. The steerman's hand pushes or draws the tiller an inch from or towards him, and the huge vessel yaws accordingly. Speech is often loose. Most men set less careful watch on the door of their lips than of their actions; but it would be wiser to watch the inner gate, which leads from thought to speech, than the outer one, which leads from speech to act. Idle words, rash words, unconsidered words, free-flowing words, make up much of our conversation. 'His tongue ran away with him' is too often true. It is hard but possible, and it is needful, to guide the helm, to keep a tight hand on the reins.

II. The next figure is that of the fire, suggested by the illustration of the small spark which sets a great forest ablaze. Drop a match or a spark from a locomotive or a pipe in the prairie grass, and we know what comes. The illustration was begun to carry on the contrast between the small member and its great results; but James catches fire, and goes off after the new suggestion, 'The tongue is a fire.'

Our space forbids discussing the interpretation of the difficult verse 6, but the general bearing of it is clear. It reiterates under a fresh figure the thought of the preceding verses as to the power of the tongue to set the whole body in motion. Only the imagery is more lurid, and suggests more fatal issues from an unhallowed tongue's influence. It 'defileth the whole body.' Foul speech, heard in schools or places of business, read in filthy books, heard in theatres, has polluted many a young life, and kindled fires which have destroyed a man, body and soul. Speech is like the axle which, when it gets heated, sets the wheel on fire. And what comes of the train then? And what set the axle ablaze? The sulphurous flames from the pit of Gehenna. No man who knows life, especially among young boys and young men, will think that James has lost the government of *his* tongue in speaking thus.

III. Next comes the figure of the untamable wild beast. We need not pin James down to literal accuracy any more than to scientific classification in his zoology. His general statement is true enough for his purpose, for man has long ago tamed, and still continues to use as tamed, a crowd of animals of most diverse sorts, fierce and meek, noxious and harmless.

But, says James, in apparent contradiction to himself, there is one creature that resists all such efforts. Then what is the sense of your solemn exhortations, James, if 'the tongue can no man tame'? In that case he who is able to bridle it must be more than a perfect man. Yes, James believed that, though he says little about it. He would have us put emphasis on 'no *man*.' Man's impossibilities are Christ's actualities. So we have here to fall back on James's earlier word, 'If any of you lack, . . . let him ask of God, . . . an it shall be given him.' The position of 'man' in the Greek is emphatic, and suggests that the thought of divine help is present to the Apostle.

He adds a characterisation of the tongue, which fits in with his image of an untamable brute: 'It is a restless evil,' like some caged but unsubdued wild animal, ever pacing uneasily up and down its den; 'full of deadly poison,' like some captured rattlesnake. The venom spurted out by a calumnious tongue is more deadly than any snake poison. Blasphemous words, or obscene words, shot into the blood by one swift dart of the fangs, may corrupt its whole current, and there is no Pasteur to expel the virus.

IV. The last image, that of the fountain, is adduced to illustrate the strange inconsistencies of men, as manifested in their speech. Words of prayer and words of cursing come from the same lips. No doubt these hot-tempered, and sometimes ferociously religious, Jewish Christians, to whom James speaks, had some among them whose portraits James is drawing here. 'Away with such a fellow from the earth!' is a strange sequel to 'Blessed be he, the God of our fathers.' But the combination has often been heard since. Te Deums and anathemas have succeeded one another in strange union, and religious controversy has not always been conducted with perfect regard to James's precepts.

Of course when the Apostle gibbets the grotesque inconsistency of such a union, he is not to be taken as allowing cursing, if it only keeps clear of 'blessing God.' Since the latter is the primary duty of all, and the highest exercise of the great gift of speech, anything inconsistent with it is absolutely forbidden, and to show the inconsistency is to condemn the act.

Further, the assertion that 'salt water cannot yield sweet' implies that the 'cursing' destroys the reality of the verbal 'blessing God.' If a man says both, the imprecation is his genuine voice, and the other is mere wind.

The fountain is deeper than the tongue. From the heart are the issues of life. Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, and clear, pure waters will not well out thence unless the heart has been cleansed by Christ entering into it. Only when that tree of life is cast into the waters are they made sweet. When Christ governs us, we can govern our hearts and our lips, and through these our whole bodies and all their activities.

EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

EPHESIANS

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SAINTS AND FAITHFUL

'The saints which are at Ephesus and the faithful in Christ Jesus.'—EPH. i. 1.

THAT is Paul's way of describing a church. There were plenty of very imperfect Christians in the community at Ephesus and in the other Asiatic churches to which this letter went. As we know, there were heretics amongst them, and many others to whom the designation of 'holy' seemed inapplicable. But Paul classes them all under one category, and describes the whole body of believing people by these two words, which must always go together if either of them is truly applied, 'saints' and 'faithful.'

Now I think that from this simple designation we may gather two or three very obvious indeed, and very familiar and old-fashioned, but also very important, thoughts.

I. A Christian is a saint.

We are accustomed to confine the word to persons who tower above their brethren in holiness and manifest godliness and devoutness. The New Testament never does anything like that. Some people fancy that nobody can be a saint unless he wears a special uniform of certain conventional sanctities. The New Testament does not take that point of view at all, but regards all true believers in Jesus Christ as being, therein and thereby, saints.

Now, what does it mean by that? The word at bottom simply signifies separation. Whatever is told off from a mass for a specific purpose would be called, if it were a thing, 'holy.' But there is one special kind of separation which makes a person a saint, and that is separation to God, for His uses, in obedience to His commandment, that He may employ the man as He will. So in the Old Testament the designation 'holy' was applied quite as much to the high priest's mitre or to the sacrificial vessels of the Temple as it was to the people who used them. It did not imply originally, and in the first place, moral qualities at all, but simply that this person or that thing belonged to God. But then you cannot belong to God unless you are like Him. There can be no consecration to God except the heart is being purified. So the ordinary meaning of holiness, as moral purity and cleanness from sin, necessarily comes from the original meaning, separation and devotion to the service of God.

Thus we get the whole significance of Christian holiness. We are to belong to God, and to know that we do belong to Him. We are to be separated from the mass of people and things that have no consciousness of ownership and do not yield themselves up to Him for His use. But we cannot belong to Him, and be devoted to His service, unless we are being made day by day pure in heart, and like Him to whom we say that we belong. A human being can only be God's by the surrender of heart and will, and through the continual appropriation into his own character and life, of righteousness and purity like that which belongs to God. Holiness is God's stamp upon a man, His 'mark,' by which He says—This man belongs to Me. As you write your name in a book, so God writes His name on His property, and the name that He writes is the likeness of His own character.

Note, again, that in God's church there is no aristocracy of sanctity, nor does the name of saint belong only to those who live high above the ordinary tumults of life and the secularities of daily duty. You may be as true a saint in a factory—ay! and a far truer one—than in a hermitage. You do not need to cultivate a mediæval or Roman Catholic type of ascetic piety in order to be called saints. You do not need to be amongst the select few to whom it is given here upon earth, but not given without their own effort, to rise to the highest summits of holy conformity with the divine will. But down amongst all the troubles and difficulties and engrossing occupations of our secular work, you may be living saintly lives; for the one condition of being holy is that we should know whose we are and whom we serve, and we can carry the consciousness of belonging to Him into every corner of the poorest, most crowded, and most distracted life, recognising His presence and seeking to do His will. The saint is the man who says, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; Thou hast loosed my bonds.' Because He has loosed my bonds, the bonds that held me to my sins, He has therein fastened me with far more stringent bonds of love to the sweet and free service of His redeeming love. All His children are His saints.

The Old Testament ritual had one sacrifice which carried this truth in it. It is the first prescribed in the Book of Leviticus, the ceremonial book—namely, the burnt offering. Its especial meaning was this, that the whole man is to be laid upon God's altar and there consumed in the fire of a divine love. It began with expiation, as all sacrifices must, and on the footing of expiation there followed the transformation, by the fire of God, from gross earthliness into vapour and odour which went up in wreaths of fragrance acceptable to God. So *we* are to be laid upon the divine altar. So, because we have been accepted in the Beloved, and have received the atonement for our sins through His great sacrifice, we are to be consecrated to His service and, touched by the fire which He sends down, we are to be changed into a sweet odour acceptable to Him as were 'the saints which are in Ephesus.'

II. Further, Christian men are saints because they are believers.

'The saints' and 'the faithful' are not two sets of people, but one. The Apostle starts, as it were, on the surface, and goes down; takes off the uppermost layer and lets us see what is below it; begins with the flowers or the fruit, and then carries us to the root. The saints are saints because they are first of all faithful. 'Faithful' here, of course, does not mean, as it usually does in our ordinary language, 'true' and 'trusty,' 'reliable' and 'keeping our word,' but it means simply 'believing'; having faith, not in the sense of *fidelity*, but in the sense of *trust*.

So, then, here is Paul's notion—and it is not only Paul's notion, it is God's truth—that the only way by which a man ever comes to realise that he belongs to God, and to yield himself in glad surrender to His uses, and so to become pure and holy like Him whom He loves and aspires to, is by humble faith in Jesus Christ. If you want to talk in theological terminology, sanctification follows upon faith. It is when we believe and trust in Jesus Christ that all the great motives begin to tell upon life and heart, which deliver us from our selfishness, which bind us to God, which make it a joy to do anything for His service, which kindle in our hearts the flame of fructifying and consecrating and transforming love. Faith, the simple reliance of a desperate and therefore trusting heart upon Jesus Christ for all that it needs, is the foundation of the loftiest elevation and attainment of the Christian character. We begin down there that we may set the shining topstone of 'Holiness to the Lord' upon the heaven-pointing summit of our lives.

Note how here Paul sets forth the object of our faith and the blessedness of it. I do not think I am forcing too much meaning into his words when I ask you to notice with what distinct emphasis and intentional fulness he employs the double name of our Lord here to describe the object upon which our faith fixes 'Faithful in *Christ Jesus*.' We must lay hold of the Manhood, and we must lay hold of the office. We must rest our soul's salvation on Him as our brother, Jesus who was incarnate in sinful flesh for us; and we must also rest it on Him as God's anointed, who came in human flesh to fulfil the divine loving-kindness and purposes, and in that flesh to die. A faith in a Jesus who was not a Christ would not sanctify; a faith in a Christ who is not Jesus would be impalpable and impotent. We must take the two together, believing and feeling that we lay hold upon a loving Man, 'bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh'; and also upon Him who in His very humanity is the Messenger and Angel of God's covenant; the Christ for whom the way has been being prepared from the beginning, and who has come to fulfil all the purposes of the divine heart.

And notice, too, how there is suggested here also, the blessedness of that faith, inasmuch as it is a faith *in* Christ. The New Testament speaks in diverse ways about the relation between the believing soul and

Jesus Christ. It sometimes speaks of faith as being *towards* Him, and that suggests the going out of a hand that, as it were, stretches towards what it would lay hold of. It sometimes speaks of faith as being *on* Him, which suggests the idea of a building on its foundation, or a hand leaning on a support. And it sometimes speaks, as here, of faith being '*in* Him,' which suggests the folded wings of the dove that has found its nest, the repose of faith, the quiet rest in the Lord, and 'waiting patiently for Him.' Such trust so directed is the one condition of such tranquillity. Then, again, note a Christian is all that he is because he is 'in Christ.' That phrase 'in Him' is in some sense the keynote of this Epistle to the Ephesians. If you will look over the letter, and pick out all the connections in which the expression 'in Him' occurs, I think you will be astonished to see how rich and full are its uses, and how manifold the blessings of which it is the condition. But the use which Paul makes of it here is just this—everything in our Christian life depends upon our being rooted and grafted in Jesus. Dear brethren, the main weakness, I believe, of what is called Evangelical Christianity has been that it has not always kept true to the proportionate prominence which the New Testament gives to the two thoughts, 'Christ for us,' and 'Christ in us.' For one sermon that you have heard which has dwelt earnestly and believingly on the thought of the indwelling Christ and the Christian indwelling in Him, you have heard a hundred about the Sacrifice on the Cross for sins, and the great atonement that was made by it. Those of you, who have listened to me from Sunday to Sunday, know that I am not to be charged with minimising or neglecting that truth, but I want to lay upon all your hearts this earnest conviction, that a gospel which throws into enormous prominence 'Christ for us,' and into very small prominence 'Christ in us,' is lame of one foot, is lopsided, untrue to the symmetry and proportion of the Gospel as it is revealed in the New Testament, and will never avail for the nourishment and maturity of Christian souls. 'Christ for us' by all means, and for evermore, but 'Christ *in* us,' or else He will not be '*for* us.'

III. Lastly, a Christian may be a saint, and a believer, and in Christ Jesus, though he is in Ephesus.

Many of you know that probably the words 'in Ephesus' are no part of the original text of this epistle, which was apparently a circular letter, in which the designation of the various churches to which it was sent was left blank, to be filled in with the name of each little community to which Paul's messenger from Rome carried it. The copy from which our text was taken had probably been delivered at Ephesus; and, at any rate, one of the copies would go there. What was Ephesus? Satan's very headquarters and seat in Asia Minor, a focus of idolatry, superstition, wealth, luxury springing from commerce, and moral corruption. 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' The books of Ephesus were a synonym for magical books. Many of us know how rotten to the core the society of that great city was. And there, on the dunghill, was this little garden of fragrant and flowering plants. They were 'saints in Christ Jesus,' though they were 'saints in Ephesus.'

Never mind about surroundings. It is possible for us to keep ourselves in the love of God, and in the fellowship of His Son wherever we are, and whatever may lie around us. You and I have too to live in a big, wicked city, and to work out our religion in a society honeycombed with corruption, because of commerce and other influences. Do not let us forget that these people whom Paul called 'saints' and 'faithful' had a harder fight to wage than we have, with less to hearten and strengthen them in it. Only remember if the 'saints in Ephesus' are to be 'in Christ,' they need to keep themselves very straight up. The carbonic acid gas is heavy and goes down to the bottom of the cave, and if a man will walk bolt upright, he will keep his nostrils above it; but if he stoops, he will get down into it. Walk straight up, with your head erect, looking to the Master, and your respiratory organs will be above the poison. If we are to *be* in Christ when we are in Ephesus, we need to keep ourselves separate and faithful, and to *keep ourselves* in Christ. If the diver comes out of the diving-bell he is drowned. If he keeps inside its crystal walls he may be on the bottom of the ocean, but he is dry and safe. Keep in the fortress by loyal faith, by humble realisation of His presence, by continual effort, and 'nothing shall by any means harm you,' but 'your lives shall be holy, being hid with Christ in God.'

'ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS'

'Blessed be God . . . who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.'—EPH. i. 3.

IT is very characteristic of Paul's impetuous fervour and exuberant faith that he begins this letter with a doxology, and plunges at once into the very heart of his theme. Colder natures reach such heights by slow degrees. He gains them at a bound, or rather, he dwells there always. Put a pen into his hand, and it is like tapping a blast furnace; and out rushes a fiery stream at white heat. But there is a great deal more than fervour in the words. In the rush of his thoughts there is depth and method. We come slowly after, and try by analysing and meditation to recover some of the fervour and the fire of such utterances as this.

Notice that buoyant, joyous, emphatic reiteration: 'Blessed,' 'blest,' 'blessings.' That is more than the fascination exercised over a man's mind by a word; it covers very deep thoughts and goes very far into the centre of the Christian life. God blesses us by gifts; we bless Him by words. The aim of His act of blessing is to evoke in our hearts the love that praises. We receive first, and then, moved by His mercies, we give. Our highest response to His most precious gifts is that we shall 'take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord,' and in the depth of thankful and recipient hearts shall say, 'Blessed be God who hath blessed us.'

Now I think that I shall best bring out the deep meaning of these words if I simply follow them as they lie before us. I do not wish to say anything about our echo in blessing God. I wish to speak about the original sweet sound, His blessing to us.

I. And I note, first of all, the character and the extent of these blessings which are the constituents of the Christian life.

'All spiritual blessings,' says the Apostle. Now, I am not going to weary you with mere exegetical remarks, but I do want to lay stress upon this, that, when the Apostle speaks about 'spiritual blessings,' he does not merely use that word 'spiritual' as defining the region in us in which the blessings are given, though that is also implied; but rather as pointing to the medium by which they are conferred. That is to say, he calls them 'spiritual,' not because they are, unlike material and outward blessings, gifts for the inner man, the true self, but because they are imparted to the waiting spirit by that Divine Spirit who communicates to men all the most precious things of God. They are 'spiritual' because the Holy Spirit is the medium of communication by which they reach men's spirits.

And I may just pause for one moment—and it shall only be for a moment—to point out to you how inwoven into the very texture of the writer's thoughts, and all the more emphatic because quite incidental, and needing to be looked for to be found, is here the evidence of his believing that the name of God was God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For it is the Father who is the Giver, the Son who is the Reservoir, the Spirit who is the Communicator, of these spiritual gifts. And I do not think that any man could have written these words of my text, the main purpose of which is altogether different to setting forth the mystery of the divine nature, unless he had believed in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

But, apart altogether from that, let me remind you in one sentence of how the gifts which thus come to men by that Divine Spirit derive their characteristic quality from their very medium of communication. There are many other blessings for which we have to say, 'Blessed be God'; for all the gifts that come from 'the Father of Lights' are light, and everything that the Fountain of sweetness bestows upon mankind is sweet, but earthly blessings are but the shadow of blessing. They remain without us, and they pass. And if they were all for which we had to praise God, our praises had need to be often checked by sobs and tears, and often very doubtful and questioning. If there were none other but such, and if this poor life were all, then I do not think it would be true that it is

> 'better to have loved and lost,
> Than never to have loved at all.'

It is but a quavering voice of praise, with many a sob between, that goes up to bless God for anything but spiritual blessings. Though it is true that all which comes from the Father of Lights is light, the sorrows and troubles that He sends have the light terribly muffled in darkness, and it needs strong faith and insight to pierce through the cloud to see the gleam of anything bright beneath. But when we turn to this other region, and think of what comes to every poor, tremulous, human heart, that likes to take it through that Divine Spirit—the forgiveness of sins, the rectification of errors, the purification of lusts and passions, the gleams of hope on the future, and the access with confidence into the standing and place of children; oh, then surely we can say, 'Blessed be God for spiritual blessings.'

But if the word which defines may thus seem to limit, the other word which accompanies it sweeps away every limit; for it calls upon us to bless God for *all* spiritual blessings. That is to say, there is no gap in His gift. It is rounded and complete and perfect. Whatever a man's needs may require, whatever his hopes can dream, whatever his wishes can stretch out towards, it is all here, compacted and complete. The spiritual gifts are encyclopædiacal and all-sufficient.

They are not segments, but completed circles. When God gives He gives amply.

II. So much, then, for the first point; now, in the second place, note the one divine act by which all these blessings have been bestowed.

'Blessed be God who *has* given'; or, still more definitely, pointing to some one specific moment and deed in which the benefaction was completed, 'Blessed be God who gave.'

When? Well, ideally in the depths of His own eternal mind the gift was complete or ever the recipients were created to receive it, and historically the gift was complete in the act of redemption when He spared not His Own Son, but gave Him up unto the death for us all. A man may destine an estate for the benefit of some community which for generations long may continue to enjoy its benefits, but the gift is complete when he signs the deed that makes it over. Humphrey Chetham gave the boys in his school to-day their education when, centuries ago, he assigned his property to that beneficent purpose. So, away back in the mists of Eternity the gift was completed, and the signature was put to the deed when Jesus Christ was born, and the seal was added when Jesus Christ died. 'Blessed be God who *hath* given.'

So, then, we may not only draw the conclusion which the Apostle drew, 'how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?' but we can draw an even grander one, 'Has He not with Him also freely given us all things?' And we possess them all to-day if our hearts are resting on Jesus Christ. The limit of the gift is only in ourselves. All has been given, but the question remains how much has been taken.

Oh, Christian men and women, there is nothing that we require more than to have what we have, to possess what is ours, to make our own what has been bestowed. You sometimes hear of some beggar, or private soldier, or farm labourer, who has come all at once into an estate that was his, years before he knew anything about it. There is such a boundless wealth belonging by right, and by the Giver's gift, to every Christian soul; and yet, here are we, many of us, like the paupers who sometimes turn up in workhouses, all in rags, and with deposit-receipts for £200 or £300 stitched into the rags, that they get no good out of. Here are we, with all that wealth, paupers still. Be sure that you have what you have. Do you remember the exhortation to a valiant effort in one of the stories in the Old Testament—'Know ye that Ramoth-gilead is *ours*, and we take it not?' And that is exactly what is true about hosts of professing Christians who have not, in any real sense, the possession of what God has given them. It is well to ask, for our desires are the measures of our capacities. It is well to ask, but we very often ask when what is wanted is not that we should get more, but that we should utilise what we have. And we make mistakes therein, as if God needed to be besought to give, when all the while it is we who need to be stirred up to grasp and keep the things that are freely given to us of God.

III. In the next place, notice the one place where all these blessings are kept.

'Blessed be God who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.' 'In heavenly places.' Now that does not merely define the region of origin, the locality where they originated or whence they come. It does do that, but it does a great deal more. It does not merely tell us, as we often are disposed to think that it does, that 'every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down'—though that is perfectly true, but it means much rather that in order to get the gift we must go up. They are in the heavenly places, and they cannot live anywhere else. They have been sticking shrubs in tubs outside our public buildings this last week. How long will they keep their leaves and their freshness? How soon will they need to be shifted and taken back again to the sweeter air, where they can flourish? God's spiritual gifts cannot grow in smoke and dirt and a polluted atmosphere. And if a professing Christian man lives his life on the low levels he will have very few of the heavenly gifts coming down to him there. And that is the reason—*the* reason above all others—why, with such a large provision made for all possible necessities and longings of all sorts, people who call themselves Christians go up and down the world feeble and poor, and with little enjoyment of their religion, and having verified scarcely anything of the great promises which God has given them.

Brother, according to the old word with which the Mass used to begin, '*Sursum corda*'—up with your hearts! The blessings are in the heavens, and if we want them we must go where they are. It is not enough to drink sparing draughts from the stream as it flows through the plain. Travel up to the head-waters, where the great pure fountain is, that gushes out abundant and inexhaustible. The gifts are heavenly, and there they abide, and thither we must mount if we would possess them.

Now that this understanding of the words is correct I think is clearly shown by a verse in the next chapter, where we find the very same phrase employed. In this connection the Apostle says that 'God hath raised us up together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' That is to say, the true ideal of the Christian life is that, even here and now, it is a life of such intimate union and incorporation with Jesus Christ as that where He is we are, and that even whilst we tabernacle upon earth and move about amongst its illusions and changing scenes, in the depth of our true being we may be fixed, and sit at rest with Christ where He is.

Do not dismiss that as mere pulpit rhetoric. Do not say that it is mystical and incomprehensible, and cannot be reduced into practice amidst the distractions of daily life. Brethren, it is not so! Jesus Christ Himself said about Himself that He came down from heaven, and that though He did, even whilst He wore the likeness of the flesh, and was one of us, He was 'the Son of Man which *is* in Heaven,' when He lay in the manger, when He worked at the carpenter's bench in Nazareth, when He walked with weary feet those blessed acres, when He hung, for our advantage, on the bitter Cross. And that was no incommunicable property of His mysterious nature, but it was the typical example of what it is possible for manhood to be. And you and I, if we are to possess in any measure corresponding with the gift of Christ the spiritual blessing which God bestows, must have our lives 'hid with Christ in God,' and sit together with Him in the heavenly places.

IV. Lastly, note the one Person in whom all spiritual blessings are enshrined.

'In the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' You cannot separate between Him and His gifts, neither in the way of getting Him without them, nor in the way of getting them without Him. They are Himself, and in the deepest analysis all spiritual blessings are reducible to one—viz. that the Spirit of Jesus Christ Himself shall dwell with us.

Now, that union by which it is possible for poor, empty, sinful creatures to be filled with His fulness, animated with His life, strengthened with His omnipotence, and sanctified by His indwelling—that union is the very kernel of this Epistle to the Ephesians.

I dare say I have often drawn your attention to the singular emphasis and repetition with which that phrase 'in Christ' occurs throughout the letter. Just take the two or three instances of it that I gather as I speak. In this first chapter we read, 'the faithful in Jesus Christ.' Then comes our text, 'blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' Then, in the very next verse, we read, 'chosen us in Him.' Then, a verse or two after, we have 'accepted in the Beloved,' which is immediately followed by, 'in whom we have redemption through His blood.' Then, again, 'that He might gather together in one all things in Christ, in whom also we have obtained the inheritance.' I need not make other quotations, but throughout the letter every blessing that can gladden or sanctify the human spirit is regarded by the Apostle as being stored and shrined in Jesus Christ: inseparable from Him, and therefore to be found by us only in union with Him.

And that is the point of all which I want to say—viz. that, inasmuch as all spiritual blessings that a soul can need are hived in Him in whom is all sweetness, the way, and the only way, to get them is that we, too, should pass into Him and dwell in Jesus Christ. It is His own teaching: 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Abide in Me. Separate from Me ye can do nothing,' and get nothing, and are nothing.

Oh, brethren! it is well that all our treasures should be in one place. It is better that they should all be in One Person. And if only we will lay our poor emptiness by the side of His fulness there will pass over from that infinite abundance and sufficiency everything that we can require.

We abide in Him by faith, by meditation, by love, by submission, by practical obedience, and, if we are wise, the effort of our lives will be to keep close to that Lord. As long as we keep touch with Him we have all and abound. Break the connection by wandering away, in thought and desire, by indulgence in sin, by letting earthly passions surge in and separate us from Him—break the connection by rebellion, by making ourselves our own ends and lords, and it is like switching off the electricity. Everything falls dead. You cannot have Christ's blessing unless you take Christ.

And so, dear brethren, 'abide in Me and I in you.' There is nothing else that will make us blessed; there is nothing else that will meet all the circumference of our necessities; there is nothing else that will quiet our hearts, will sanctify our understandings. Christ is yours if 'ye are Christ's.' 'Of His fulness *have* all we received,' for it all became ours when we became His, and Christian growth on earth and heaven is but the unfolding of the folded graces that are contained in Him. We possess the whole Christ, but eternity is needed to disclose all the unsearchable riches of our inheritance in Him.

'ACCORDING TO'—I.

'According to the good pleasure of His will. . . . According to the riches of His grace.'—EPH. i. 5, 7.

THAT phrase, 'according to,' is one of the key-words of this profound epistle, which occurs over and over again, like a refrain. I reckon twelve instances of it in three chapters of the letter, and they all introduce one or other of the two thoughts which appear in the two fragments that I have taken for my text. They either point out how the great blessings of Christ's mission have underlying them the divine purpose, or they point out how the process of the Christian life in the individual has for its source and measure the abundances, the wealth of the grace and the power of God. So in both aspects the facts of earth are traced up to, and declared to be, the outcome of the heavenly depths, and that gives solemnity, grandeur, elevation, to this epistle all its own. We are carried, as it were, away up into the recesses of the mountains of God, and we look down upon the unruffled, mysterious, deep lake, from which come the rivers that water all the plains beneath.

Now of these two types of reference to the divine will and the divine wealth, I should like to gather together the instances, as they occur in this letter, in so far as I can, in the course of a sermon, touching them, it must be, very imperfectly. But I fear that it is impossible to deal with both the phases of this 'according to,' in one discourse. So I confine myself to that which is suggested by the first of our two texts, in the hope that some other day we may be able to overtake the other. So then, we have set before us here the Christian thought of the divine will which underlies, and therefore is manifest by, the work of Jesus Christ, in its whole sweep and breadth. And I just take up the various instances in which this expression occurs in a great variety of forms, but all retaining substantially the same meaning.

I. Note that that divine will which underlies and is operative in, and therefore is certified to us by the whole work of Jesus Christ, in its facts and its consequences, is a 'good pleasure.'

Now there are few thoughts which the history of the world has shown to be more productive of iron and steel in the human character than that of the sovereign will of God. That made Islam, and is the secret of its power to-day, amidst its many corruptions. Because these wild desert tribes were all stiffened, or I might say inflamed, by that profound conviction, the sovereign will of God, they came down like a hammer upon that corrupt so-called Christian Church, and swept it off the face of the earth, as it deserved to be swept. And the same thought of the sovereign will, of which we are but instruments—pawns on its chess-board—made the grand seventeenth century Puritanism in England, and its sister type of men and of religion in Holland. For this is a historically proved thesis, that there is nothing which so contributes to the formation, and valuation of, and the readiness to die for, civil liberty, as the firm grasp of that thought of the divine sovereignty. Just because a man realises that the will of God is supreme over all the earth, he rebels against all forms of human despotism.

But with all the good that is in that great thought —and the Christianity of this day sorely wants the strength that might be given it by the exhibition of that steel medicine—it wants another, 'the good pleasure of His will.' And that word, 'good pleasure, does not express, as I think, in Paul's usage of it, the simple notion of sovereignty, but always the notion of a benevolent sovereignty. It is 'the good pleasure'—as it is put in another place by the same Apostle—'of His goodness.' And that thought, let in upon the solemnity and severity of the other one, is all that it needs in order to make the man who grasps it not only a hero in conflict, and a patient martyr in endurance, but a child in his Father's house, rejoicing in the love of his Father everywhere and always.

Paul would have us believe that if we will take the work of Jesus Christ in the facts of His life, and its results upon humanity, as our horn-book and lesson, we shall draw from that some conceptions of the great thing that underlies it, 'the good pleasure of His will.' We stand in front of this complex universe, and some of us say: 'Law'; and some of us say: 'A Lawgiver behind the law; a Person at the heart of all things'; but unless we can say: 'And in the heart of the Person a will, which is the expression of a steadfast, omnipotent love,' then the world seems to me to be a place of unsolvable riddles and a torture-house. There goes the great steam-roller along the road. Everybody can see that it crushes down, and makes its own path. Who drives it? The steam in the boiler, or is there a hand on the lever? And what drives the hand? Christianity answers, and answers with unfaltering lip, rising clear above contradictions apparent and difficulties real, 'The good pleasure of His will,' and there men can rest.

Then there is another step. Another form in which this 'according to' appears in this letter is, if we adopt the rendering, which I am disposed to do in the present case, of the Authorised Version rather than of the Revised, 'according to His good pleasure . . . which He hath purposed in Himself.' The Revised Version says, 'Which He hath purposed in Him,' and that is a perfectly possible rendering. But to me the old one is not only more eloquent, but more in accordance with the connection. So I venture to accept it without further ado—'His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.'

That brings us into the presence of that same great thought, which in another aspect is expressed in saying 'His name is Jehovah,' and in yet another aspect is expressed in saying 'God is love,' viz. the thought which sounds familiar, but which has in it depths of strength and illumination and joy, if we rightly ponder it, that, to use human words, the motive of the divine action is all found within the divine nature.

We love one another because we discern, or think we discern, lovable qualities in the being on whom our love falls. God loves because He is God. That great artesian fountain wells up from the depths, by its own sweet impulse, and pours itself out; and 'the good pleasure of His goodness' has no other explanation than that it is His nature and property to be merciful. And so, dear brethren, we get clean past what has sometimes been the misapprehension of good people, and has oftener been the caricatured representation of Evangelical truth which its enemies have put forth—that God was made to love and pity by reason of the sacrifice of the Son, whereas the very opposite is the case. God loves, therefore He sent His Son, 'that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life,' and the notion of the Cross of Christ as changing the divine heart is as far away from Evangelical truth as it is from the natural conceptions that men form of the divine nature. We shake hands with our so-called antagonists and say, 'Yes! we believe as much as you do that God does not love us because Christ died, but we believe what perhaps you do not, that Christ died because God loves us, and would save us.' 'The good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.'

Then, still further, there is another aspect of this same divine will brought out in other parts of this letter, of which this is a specimen, 'Having made known unto us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fulness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ,' which, being turned into more modern phraseology, is just this—that the great aim of that divine sovereign will, self-originated, full of loving-kindness to the world, is to manifest to all men what God is, that all men may know Him for what He is, and thereby be drawn back again, and grouped in peaceful unity round His Son, Jesus Christ. That is the intention which is deepest in the divine heart, the desire which God has most for every one of us. And when the Old Testament tells us that the great motive of the divine action is for 'My own Name's sake,' that expression might be so regarded as to disclose an ugly despot, who only wants to be reverenced by abject and submissive subjects. But what it really means is this, that the divine love which hovers over its poor, prodigal children because it *is* love, and, therefore, lovingly delights in a loving recognition and response, desires most of all that all the wanderers should see the light, and that every soul of man should be able to whisper, with loving heart, the name, 'Abba! Father!' Is not that an uplifting thought as being the dominant motive which puts in action the whole of the divine activity? God created in order that He might fling His light upon creatures, who should thereby be glad. And God has redeemed in order that in Jesus Christ we might see Him, and, seeing Him, be at rest, and begin to grow like Him. This is the aim, 'That they might know Thee, the only true God . . . whom to know is eternal life.' And so self-communication and self-revelation is the very central mystery of the will.

But that is not all. Another of the forms in which this phrase occurs tells us that that great purpose, the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, was that, 'Now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known' by the Church 'the manifold wisdom of God.' And so we get another thought, that that whole work of redemption, operated by the Incarnation, and culminating in the Crucifixion and Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, stands as being the means by which other orders of creatures, besides ourselves, learn to know 'the manifold wisdom of God.' According to the grand old saying, at Creation the 'morning stars sang together for joy.' All spiritual creatures, be they 'higher' or 'lower,' can only know God by the observation of His acts.

> ''Twas great to speak a world from nought,
> 'Tis greater to redeem,'

and the same angelic lips that sang these praises on the morning of Creation have learnt a new song that they sing: 'Glory and honour and dominion and power be unto the Lamb that was slain.'

Thus to principalities and powers, a diviner height in the loftiness, and a diviner depth in the condescension, and a diviner tenderness in the love, and a diviner energy in the power, of the redeeming God have been made known, and this is the thought of His eternal purpose. And that brings me to another point which is involved in the words that I have just quoted, which stand in connection with those that I have previously referred to. The phrase 'eternal purpose' literally rendered is, 'the purpose of the ages,' and that, no doubt, may mean 'eternal' in the sense of running on through all the ages; or it may mean, perhaps, that which we usually attach to the word 'eternal,' viz. unbeginning and unending. I take the former meaning as the more probable one, that the Apostle contemplates that great will of God which culminates in Jesus Christ, as coming solemnly sweeping through all the epochs of time from the beginning. In a deeper sense than the poet meant it, 'Through the ages an increasing purpose runs,' and that binds the epochs of humanity together—'the purpose of God in Christ Jesus.' The philosophy of history lies there, and it is a true instinct that makes the cradle at Bethlehem the pivot around which the world's chronology revolves. For the deepest thing about all the ages on the further side of it is that they are 'Before Christ,' and the formative fact for all the ages after it is that they are *Anno Domini.*

And now the last thing that is suggested by yet another of these eloquent expressions is deduced from another part of the same phrase. The purpose of the ages is described as that which 'He purposed in Christ

Jesus our Lord.' Now the word 'purposed' literally is 'made.' And it may be a question whether 'purposed' or 'accomplished' is the special meaning to be attached to the general word 'made.' Either is legitimate. I take it that what the Apostle means here is that the purpose of God, which we have thus seen as sovereign, self-originated, having for its great aim the communication to all His creatures of the knowledge of Himself, and running through the ages, and binding them into a unity, reaches its entire accomplishment in the Cradle, and the Cross, and the Throne of Jesus Christ our Lord.

He fulfils the divine intention. There is that one life, and in that life alone of humanity you have a character which is in entire sympathy with the divine mind, which is in full possession of the divine truth, which never diverges or deviates by a hair's-breadth from the divine will, which is the complete and perfect exponent to man of the divine heart and character; and that Christ is the fulfilment of all that God desired in the depths of eternity, and the abysses of His being. Did He will that men should know Him? Christ has declared Him. Did He will that men should be drawn back to Him? Christ lifted on the Cross draws all men unto Him. Was it 'according to the good pleasure of His goodness' that we men should attain to the adoption of sons? By that Son we too became sons. Was it the purpose of His will that we should obtain an 'inheritance'? We obtain it in Jesus Christ, 'being heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.' All that God willed to do is done. And when we look, on the one hand, up to that infinite purpose, and on the other, to the Cross, we hear from the dying lips, 'It is finished!' The purpose of the ages is accomplished in Christ Jesus.

Is it accomplished with you? I have been speaking about the divine counsel which is a 'good pleasure,' which runs through the whole history of mankind. But it is a divine purpose that you can thwart as far as you are concerned. 'How often would I have gathered . . . and ye would not,' and your 'would not' neutralises His 'would.' Do not stand in the way of the steam-roller. You cannot stop it, but it can crush you. Do not have Him say about you, 'In vain have I smitten, in vain have I loved.' Bow, accept, recognise that all God's armoury is brought to bear upon each of us in that great Cross and Passion, in that great Incarnation and human life. And I beseech you, in your hearts, let the will of God be done even as for a world it has been done by the sacrifice of Calvary.

'ACCORDING TO'—II.

'According to the riches of His grace.'—EPH. i. 7.

WE have seen, in a previous sermon, that a characteristic note of this letter is the frequent occurrence of that phrase 'according to.' I also then pointed out that it was employed in two different directions. One class of passages, with which I then tried to deal, used it to compare the divine purpose in our salvation with the historical process of the salvation. The type of that class of reference is found in a verse just before my text, 'according to the good pleasure of His will.' There is a second class of passages to which our text belongs, where the comparison is not between the purpose and its realisation, but between the stores of the divine riches and the experiences of the Christian life. The one set of passages suggests the ground of our salvation in the deep purpose of God; the other suggests the measure of the power which is working out that salvation.

The instances of this second use of the phrase, besides the one in my text, 'according to the riches of His grace,' are such as these: 'According to the riches of His glory'; 'According to the power that worketh in us'; 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ'; 'According to the energy of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.'

Now it is clear that all these are varying forms of the same thing. They vary in form, they are identical in substance. What a Jew calls a 'cubit' an Englishman calls a 'foot,' but the result is pretty nearly the same. Shillings, marks, francs, are various standards; they all come to substantially the same result. These varying measures of the divine gift which is at work in man's salvation, have this in common, that they all run out into God's immeasurable, unlimited power, boundless wealth. And so, if we gather them together, and try to focus them in a few words, they may help to widen our conceptions of what we ought to expect from God, to bow us in contrition as to the small use that we have made of it, and to open our desires wide, that they may be filled.

I only aspire, then, to deal with these four forms which I have already suggested.

I. The measure of our possible attainments is the whole wealth of God.

'According to the riches of His grace.' Another angle at which the same thought is viewed appears in another part of the letter, where we have this variation in the expression, 'According to the riches of His glory.' 'Grace' and 'Glory' are generally opposed antithetically; in this epistle they are united, for in the verse before my text I read: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace.' So the first thought is, the whole wealth of God is available for every Christian soul.

Now it seems to me that there are very few things that the popular Christianity of this day needs more than a furnishing up of the familiar old Christian terminology, which has largely lost the freshness and the power that it once had. They tell us that these incandescent burners, that we are using nowadays, are very much more bright when they are first fixed than after the mantle gets a little worn. So it is with the terminology of Christianity. It needs to be re-stated, not in such a way as to take the pith out of it, which is what a great deal of the modern craze for re-statement means, but in such a way as to brighten it up again, and to invest it with something of the 'celestial light' with which it was 'apparelled' when it first came. Now that word 'grace,' I have no doubt, sounds to you hard, theological, remote. But what does it mean? It gathers into one burning point the whole of the rays of that conception of God, with which it is the glory of Christianity to have flooded and drenched the world. It tells us that at the heart of the universe there is a heart; that God is Love, that that love is the motive-spring of His activity, that it comes and bends over the lowliest with a smile of amity on its lips, with healing and help in its hands, with forgiveness for all sins against itself, with boundless wealth for the poorest, and that the wealth of His self-communicating love is the measure of the wealth that each of us may possess.

God gives 'according to the riches of His grace.' You do not expect a millionaire to give half-a-crown to a subscription fund; and God gives royally, divinely, measuring His bestowments by the abundance of His treasures, and handing over with an open palm large gifts of coined money, because there are infinite chests of uncirculated bullion in the deep storehouses. 'How great is Thy goodness which Thou hast manifested before the sons of men for them that fear Thee. How much greater is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up in store.' But whilst He gives all, the question comes to be: What do I receive? The measure of His gift is His measureless grace; the measure of my reception is my—alas! easily-measured faith. What about the unearned increment? What about the unrealised wealth? Too many of us are like some man who has a great estate in another land. He knows nothing about it, and is living in grimy poverty in a back street. For you have all God's riches waiting for you, and 'the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice' at your beck and call, and yet you are but poorly realising your possible riches. Alas, that when we might have so much we do have so little. 'According to the riches of His grace' He gives. But another 'according to' comes in. 'According to thy faith be it unto thee.' So we have to take these two measures together, and the working limit of our possession of God's riches comes out of the combination of them both.

Let me remind you, before I pass on, of what I have already suggested is but another phase of this same thought. Paul says in this epistle that God gives not only 'according to the riches of His grace,' but 'according to the riches of His glory,' and that the latter expression is substantially identical with the former, is plain from the combination of the two in an earlier verse of this chapter: 'To the praise of the glory of His grace.' Thus we come to the blessed thought that the glory of God is essentially the revelation of that stooping, pitying, pardoning, enriching love. Not in the physical attributes, not in the characteristics of the divine nature which part Him off from men, and make Him remote, both from their conceptions and their affections, but in the love that bends to them is the true glory of God. All these other things are but the fringes; the centre of glory is the Love, which is the mightiest and the divinest thing in the Might Divine. The sunshine is far stronger than the lightning, and there is more force developed in the rain than in an earthquake. That truth is what Christianity has made the common possession of the world. It has thereby broken the chains of dread; it has bridged over the infinite distance. It has given us a God that can love and be loved, can stoop and can lift, can pardon and can purify. 'According to the good pleasure of His goodness,'—there is the foundation of our salvation. 'According to the riches of His grace,'—there is the measure of our salvation.

II. We have another form of the same measure in another set of verses which speak of the present working of God's power.

The Apostle speaks in regard to his own apostolic commission of its being given 'according to the working of His power'; and he speaks of all Christian men as receiving gifts 'according to the power that worketh in us.' So there we have a standard that comes, as it were, a little closer to ourselves. We do not need to travel up into the dim abysses above, or think of the sanctities and the secrecies of that divine heart in the light which is inaccessible, but we have the measure in ourselves.

The standards of length are kept at Greenwich, the standards of capacity are kept in the Tower; but there are local standards distributed throughout the land to which men may go and have their measures corrected. And so besides all these lofty thoughts about the grace and the glory which measures His gift, we can turn within, if we are Christian people, and say, 'According to the power that worketh in us.'

Ah, brethren! there are few things that we want more than to revive and deepen the conviction that in every Christian man, by virtue of his faith, and in proportion to his faith, there is in operation an actual, superhuman, divine power moulding his nature, guiding, quickening, ennobling, lifting, confirming, and hallowing and shaping him into conformity with Jesus Christ. I would that we all believed not as a dogma, but realised as a personal experience, that irrefragable truth, 'Know ye not that the Spirit of Christ dwelleth in you, except ye be reprobate?' The life of self is evil; the life of Christ in self is good, and only good. And if you are Christian men, and in the proportion, as I have said, in which you are living by faith, you have working in your spirits the very Spirit of Christ Himself.

And that power is the measure of your possibilities. Obviously 'the power that worketh in us' is able to do a great deal more than it is doing in any of us. And so with deep significance the Apostle, side by side with his adducing of this power as being the measure of our possible attainments, speaks about God as being 'able to do for us, exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' 'The power that works in us' transcends in its possibilities our present experience, it transcends our conceptions, it transcends our desires. It is able to do everything; it actually does—well, you know what it does in you. And the responsibility of hampering and hindering that power from working out its only adequately corresponding results lies at our own doors. 'A rushing, mighty wind'—yes; and in myself a scarcely perceptible breathing, and often a dead calm, stagnant as in the latitudes on either side of the Equator, where, for long, dreary days, no freshening motion in the atmosphere is perceptible. 'A fire?' —yes; then why is my grate full of grey, cold ashes, and one little spark in the corner? 'A fountain springing into everlasting life?'—yes; then why in my basin is there so much scum and ooze, mud and defilement, and so little of the flashing and brilliant water? 'The power that works in us' is sorely hindered by the weakness in which it works.

III. In the third place another form of this measure is stated by the Apostle, 'According to the measure of the gift of Christ.'

That means, of course, the gift which Christ bestows. It is substantially the same idea as I have just been dealing with, only looked at from rather a different point of view. Therefore, I need not dwell upon its parallelism with what has just been occupying our attention, but rather ask you simply to consider one point in reference to it, and that is that, side by side with the reference to the gift of Christ as being the measure of our possible attainments, the Apostle enlarges on the Infinite variety of the shapes which that one gift takes in different people. 'He gave some apostles, some prophets,' etc.; one man receiving according to this fashion, and another according to that, and to each of us the distribution is made 'according to the measure of the gift of Christ.' That is to say, it takes us all, the collective goodness and beauty of the whole community of saints, to approximate to the fulness of that gift, and all are needed in their different types and forms of excellence, sanctity and beauty, in order to set forth, even imperfectly, the richness and the manifoldness of His great gift. And so 'we all come' —there is a multiplicity—'unto the perfect man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ'—there is a unity in which the multiplicity inheres.

So try to get a little more of some different type of excellence than that to which you are naturally inclined. Seek, and consciously endeavour, to appropriate into your character uncongenial excellences, and be very charitable in your judgments of the different types of Christian conformity to Christ our Lord. The crystals that are set round a light do not quarrel with each other as to whether green, or yellow, or blue, or red, or violet is the true colour to reflect. We need all the seven prismatic tints to make the perfect white light. The gift of Christ is many-sided; try not to be one-sided in your reception of it.

IV. And now the last form of this measure is 'according to the energy of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.'

When we gazed upon the riches of God's grace, they were high above us, when we looked upon 'the power that worketh in us,' we saw it working amidst many hindrances and hamperings, but here there is presented to us in a concrete example, close beside us, of what God can make of a man when the man is wholly pliable to His will, and the recipient of His influences. And so there stands before us the guarantee and the pattern of immortal life, the Christ whose Manhood died and lives, who is clothed with a spiritual body, who wields royal authority in the Kingdom of the Most High. And that is the measure of what God can do with me, and wishes to do with me, if I will let Him. Christ is my pattern, and the measure of my own possibilities.

To be with Him, where and what He is, is the only adequate result of the power that works in us, and of the process that is already begun in us, if we are Christian people. You are sometimes—there is one eminent example of it in that great Medicean Chapel at Florence—a statue exquisitely finished in all its limbs, but one part left in the rough. That is the best that Christian people come to here. Shall it always be so? Do not the very imperfections prophesy completion, and is it not certain that the half-finished torso will be carried to the upper workshop, and be there disengaged from the dead marble and made to stand out in perfect beauty and fullest completeness? Christ is the object of our hopes, and no hopes of the Christian life are adequate to the power that works in us, or to the progress already made, which do not see in the 'energy of the might of the power' which wrought in Christ, the example and the guarantee of the exceeding greatness of 'His power which is to usward.'

And now, one last word. Besides all these passages which have been occupying us, there is another use of this same phrase in this letter which presents a very solemn and grim contrast. I can do no better with it than simply read it: 'Ye were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh'—mark the allusion to the other words that we have been referring to—'in the children of disobedience.' So there you have the alternative, either 'dead in trespasses and sins,' whilst living the physical and the intellectual life, or partaking of the life of Him 'who was dead, and is alive for ever more'; either 'walking according to the course of this world,' which is 'disobedience' and 'wrath,' or walking 'according to the power that worketh in us'; either 'putting on,' or rather continuing to wear, 'the old man which is corrupt according to the lusts which deceive,' or 'putting on the new man, which according to God is created in righteousness and holiness and truth.' The choice is before us. May God help us to choose aright!

GOD'S INHERITANCE AND OURS

'In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, . . . the earnest of our inheritance.'—Eph. i. 11, 14.

A DEWDROP twinkles into green and gold as the sunlight falls on it. A diamond flashes many colours as its facets catch the light. So, in this context, the Apostle seems to be haunted with that thought of 'inheriting' and 'inheritance,' and he recurs to it several times, but sets it at different angles, and it flashes back different beauties of radiance. For the words, which I have wrenched from their context in the first of these two verses, are more accurately rendered, as in the Revised Version, in 'whom also we were made,' *not* 'have obtained'—'an inheritance.' Whose inheritance? God's! The Christian community is God's possession. Then, in my second text, we have the converse thought—'the earnest of *our* inheritance. What is the Christian's possession? The same God whose possession is the Christian. So, then, there is a deep and a wonderful relation between the believing soul and God, and however different must be the two sides of that relation, the resemblance is greater than the difference. Surely that is the deepest, most blessed, and most strength-giving conception of the Christian life. Other notions of it lay stress, and that rightly, upon certain correspondence between us and God. My faith corresponds to His faithfulness and veracity. My obedience corresponds to His authority. My weakness lays hold on His strength. My emptiness is replenished by His fulness. But here we rise above the region of correspondences into that of similarity. In these other aspects the convexity fits the concavity; in this aspect the two hemispheres go together and make the complete globe. We possess God, and God possesses us, and it is the same set of facts which are set forth in the two thoughts, 'We were made an inheritance, . . . the earnest of our inheritance.'

I. Now, then, let me ask you to look first at this mutual possession.

We possess God; God possesses us. What does that mean? Well, it means plainly and chiefly this, a mutual love. For we all know—and many of us thankfully can bear witness to the truth of it in our earthly relationships,—that the one way by which a human spirit can possess a spirit is by the sweet mutual love which abolishes 'mine' and 'thine,' and all but abolishes 'me' and 'thee.' And so God sets little store by the ownership which depends on divinity and creation, though, of course, that relation brings with it a duty. As the old psalm has it, 'It is He that hath made us, and we are His'; still, such a relationship as this, based upon the connection that subsists between the Maker and the work of His hands, is so purely external, and harsh, and superficial, that God does not reckon it to be a possession at all.

You perhaps remember how, in the great word which underlies all these New Testament conceptions of God's ownership of His people, viz. the charter that constituted Israel into a nation, He said, 'Ye shall be unto Me a people for a possession above all nations, for all the earth is Mine.' And yet, though that ownership and mastership extended over everything that His hands had made, He—if I might so say—contemned it, and relegated it to a secondary position, and told the people that His heart hungered for something deeper, more real, more vital than such a possession, and that therefore, just because all the earth was His, and that was not enough to satisfy His heart, He took them and made them a peculiar treasure above all nations. We have, then, to think of that great Divine Love which possesses us when He loves us, and when we love Him.

But remember that of this sweet commerce and reverberation of love which constitutes possession, the origination must be in His heart. 'We love Him because He first loved us.' The mirrors are set all round the great hall, but their surfaces are cold and lifeless until the great candelabrum in the centre is lit, and then, from every polished sheet there flashes back an echoing, answering light, and they repeat and repeat, until you scarce can tell which is the original and which is the reflection. But quench the centre-light, and the daughter-radiances vanish into darkness. The love on either side is on one side spontaneous and underived, and on the other side is secondary and evoked, but it *is* love on both sides. His possession of us is, as it were, the upper side, and our possession of Him is, as it were, the underside of the one golden bond. It matters not whether you look at the stream with your face to its source or with your face to its mouth, the silvery plain is the same; and the deepest tie that knits men to God is the same as the tie that knits God to men. There is mutual possession because there is mutual love.

Then again, in this same thought of mutual possession there lies a mutual surrender. For to give is the life-breath of all true love, and there is nothing which the loving heart more desires than to be able to pour *itself* out—much rather than any subordinate gifts—on its object. But that, if it is one-sided, is misery, and only when it is reciprocal, is it blessed. God gives Himself to us, as we know, most chiefly in that unspeakable gift of His Son, and we possess Him by virtue of His self-communication which depends upon His love. And then we possess Him, and He possesses us, not less by the answering surrender of ourselves, which is the expression of our love. No love subsists if it is only recipient; no love subsists if it is only communicated. Exports and imports must both be realised in this sweet commerce, and we enrich ourselves far more by what we give to the Beloved than by what we keep for ourselves.

The last, the hardest thing to surrender, is our own wills. To give them up by constraint is slavery that degrades. To give them up because we love is a sacrifice which sanctifies, even in the lowest reaches of daily life. And the love that knits us to God is not invested with all its blessed possession of Him, until it has surrendered its will, and said, 'Not as I will, but as Thou wilt.' The traveller in the old fable gathered his cloak around him all the more closely, and held it the more tightly, because of the tempest that blew, but when the warm sunbeams fell he dropped it. He that would coerce my will, stiffens it into rebellion; but when a beloved one says, 'Though I might be much bold to enjoin thee, yet for love's sake I rather beseech,' then yielding is blessedness, and the giving ourselves away is the finding of God and ourselves.

I need not touch, in more than a word, upon another aspect of this mutual possession, brought into view lovingly in many parts of Scripture, and that is that there is in it not only mutual love and mutual surrender, but mutual indwelling. 'He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.' Jesus Christ has said the same thing to us, 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in Me bringeth forth much fruit.' We dwell in God, possessing Him; He dwells in us, possessing us. We dwell in God, being possessed by Him. He dwells in us, being possessed by us. And He moves in the heart that loves, as the Master walking through His house, as the divinity is present in the temple, and as the soul permeates the body, and is sight in the eye and colour in the cheek, and force in the arm, and deftness in the finger, and swiftness in the foot. So the indwelling God breathes through all the capacities, and all the desires, and all the needs of the soul which He inhabits, and makes them all blessed. The very same set of facts—the presence of a divine life in the life of the believing spirit—may either be looked at from the lower end. and then they are that I possess God, and find in Him the nutriment and the stimulus for all my being, or may be looked at from the upper end, that He possesses me and finds in me capacities and a nature the emptiness of which He fills, and organs which He uses. In both cases mutual love, mutual surrender, mutual inhabitation, make up God's possession of me and my possession of God.

II. And now let me point you in a very few words to some of the plain, practical issues of this mutual possession. God's possession of us demands our consecration. 'Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price,' therefore, to live for self is to fly in the face of the very purpose of Christ's mission and of God's communication of Himself to us. There are slaves who run away from their masters and 'deny the Lord that bought them.' *We* do that whenever, being God's slaves, we set up anything else than His will as our law, or anything else than His glory as the aim of our lives. To live for self is to die, to die to self is to live. And the solemn obligations of that most blessed possession by God of us are as solemn as the possession is blessed, and can only be discharged when we turn to Him, and yield the whole control of our nature to His merciful hand, believing that He has not only the right to dispose of us, but that His disposition of us will always coincide with our sanest conceptions of good, and our wisest desires for happiness. Yield yourselves to God, for He has yielded Himself to you, and in the yielding we realise our largest and most blessed possession. It is a good bargain to give myself and to get God.

God's possession of us not only demands consecration, but it ensures safety. Remember that great word, 'No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.' God is not a careless owner who leaves His treasures to be blown by every wind, or filched by every petty robber. He is not like the king of some decrepit monarchy, slices of whose territory his neighbours are for ever paring off and annexing. What God has God preserves. 'He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' 'They are Mine, saith the Lord, My jewels in the day which I make.' But our security depends on our consecration. 'No man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand.' No! But you can wriggle yourself out of your Father's hand, if you will. And the security avails only so long as you realise that you belong to God, and are living not for yourself.

Possessing God we are rich. There is nothing that is truly our wealth which remains outside of us, and can be separated from us. 'Shrouds have no pockets,' says the Spanish proverb. 'His glory shall not descend after him,' says the grim psalm. But if God possesses me He is not going to let His treasures be lost in the grave. And if I possess Him then I shall pass through death as a beam of light does through some denser medium—a little refracted indeed, but not broken up; and I shall carry with me all my wealth to begin another world with. And that is more than you can do with the money that you make here. If you have God, you have the capital to commence a new condition of things beyond the grave.

And so that mutual possession is the real pledge of immortal life, for nothing can be more incredible than that a soul which has risen to have God for its very own, and has bowed itself to accept God's ownership of it, can be affected by such a transient and physical incident as what we call death. We rise to the assurance of immortality because we have an inheritance which is God Himself. And in that inexhaustible Inheritance there lies the guarantee that we shall live while He lives, because He lives, and until we have incorporated into our lives all the majesty and the purity and the wisdom and the power that belong to us because they are God's.

But we have to notice the two words that lie at the beginning of our first text—'*In whom* we were made an inheritance.' That opens up the whole question of the means by which this mutual possession becomes possible for us men. Jesus Christ has died. That breaks the bondage under which the whole world is held. For the true slavery which interferes with the free service and the full possession of God is the slavery of self and sin. Jesus Christ has died. 'If the Son make you free ye shall be free indeed.' That great sacrifice not only 'breaks the power of cancelled sin,' but it also moves the heart, in the measure in which we truly accept it, to the love and the surrender which make the mutual possession of which we have been speaking. And so it is in Him that we become an Inheritance, that God comes to His rights in regard to each of us. And it is in Him that we, trusting the Son, have the inheritance for ours, and 'are heirs with God, and joint heirs with Christ.' So, dear friends, if we would 'be meet for the inheritance of the saints in light,' we must unite ourselves to that Lord by faith, and through Him and faith in Him, we shall receive 'the remission of sins and inheritance among all them that are sanctified.'

THE EARNEST AND THE INHERITANCE

The earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.'—Eph. i. 14.

I have dealt with a portion of this verse in conjunction with the fragment of another in this chapter. I tried to show you how much the idea of the mutual possession of God by the believing soul, and of the believing soul by God, was present to the Apostle's thoughts in this context. These two ideas are brought into close juxtaposition in the verse before us, for, as you will see if you use the Revised Version, the latter clause is there rightly paraphrased by the addition of a supplement, and reads 'until the redemption of God's own possession.' So that in the first clause we have 'our inheritance,' and in the second we have 'God's possession.' This double idea, however, has appended to it in this verse some very striking and important thoughts. The possession of both sides is regarded as incomplete, for what *we* have is the 'earnest' of the 'inheritance,' and '*God's* own possession' has yet to be 'redeemed,' in the fullest sense of that word, at some point in the future. An 'earnest' is a fraction of an inheritance, or of a sum hereafter to be paid, and is the guarantee and pledge that the whole shall one day be handed over to the man who has received the foretaste of it in the 'earnest.' The soldier's shilling, the ploughman's 'arles,' the clod of earth and tuft of grass which, in some forms of transfer, were handed over to the purchaser, were all the guarantee that the rest was going to come. So the great future is sealed to us by the small present and the experiences of the Christian life to-day, imperfect, fragmentary, defective as they are, are the best prophecy and the most glorious pledge of that great to-morrow. The same law of continuity which, in application to our characters, and our work, and our daily life, makes 'to-morrow as this day, and much more abundant,' in its application to the future life makes the life here its parent, and the life yonder the prolongation and the raising to its highest power, of what is the main though often impeded tendency and direction of the present. The earnest of the 'inheritance' is the pledge until the full redemption of 'God's own possession.' I wish, then, to draw attention to these additional thoughts which are here attached to the main idea with which we were dealing in the last sermon.

I. And I ask you to look with me, first, at the incompleteness of the present possession.

I tried to show in my last sermon how those great thoughts of God's having us, and our having God, rested upon the three ideas of mutual love, mutual communication, and mutual indwelling. On His side the love, the impartation, the indwelling, are all perfect. On our side they are incomplete, broken, defective; and, therefore, the incompleteness on our side hinders both God's possession of us, and our possession of Him; so that we have but the 'earnest' and not the 'inheritance.' That is to say, the ownership may be perfect in idea, but in realisation it is imperfect.

And then, if we turn to the word in the other clause, 'the redemption of the purchased possession,' that suggests the incompleteness with which God as yet owns us. For though the initial act of redeeming is complete, yet redemption is a process, and not an act. And we 'are having' it, as the Apostle says in another place very emphatically, in continual and growing experience. The estate has been acquired, but has not yet been fully subdued. For there are tribes in the jungles and in the hills who still hold out against the reign of Him who has won it for Himself. And so seeing that the redemption in its fulness is relegated to some point in the future, towards which we are progressively approximating, and seeing that the best that can be said about the Christian experience here is that we have an 'earnest of the inheritance,' we must recognise the incompleteness to-day of our possession of God, and of God's possession of us.

That is a matter of experience. We know that only too well. 'I have God'—have I? I have a drop at the bottom of a too often unsteadily held and spilling cup, and the great ocean rolls unfathomable and boundless at my feet. How partial, how fragmentary, how clouded with doubts and blank ignorance, how intermittent, and, alas! rare, is our knowledge of Him. We sometimes go down our streets between tall houses, walking in their shadow, and now and then there is a cross street down which a blaze of sunshine comes, and when we reach it, and the houses fall back, we see the blue beyond. But we go on, and we are in the shadow again. And so our earthly lives are passed, to a large extent, beneath the shade of the grimy buildings that we ourselves have put up, and which shut out heaven from us, and only now and then a slanting beam comes through some opening, and carries wistful thoughts and longings into the Empyrean beyond. And how feeble our faith, and how little of His power comes into our hearts, and how little of the joy of the Lord is realised in our daily experience we all know, and it is sometimes good for us to force ourselves to feel it is

but an 'earnest' of the 'inheritance' that the best of us has.

'God has us.' Has He? Has He my will, which submits itself, and finds joy in submitting itself, to Him? How many competitors are there for my love which come in in front of Him, and we 'cannot get at Him for the press'! How many other motives are dominant in our lives, and how often we wrench ourselves away from our submission to Him, and try to set up a little dominion of our own, and say, 'Our lives are ours; who is lord over us?' Oh, brethren! we have God if we are Christians at all, and God has us. But alas! surely all honest experience tells us that there are awful gaps in the circle, and that our possession of Him, and His possession of us, are wofully incomplete.

Now, let me remind you that this incompleteness is mainly our own fault. Of course, I know that for the absolute completeness, either of my possession of God or of His of me, I must pass from out this world, and enter upon another stage and manner of being. But it is not being in the flesh, but it is being dominated by the flesh, that is the reason for the incompleteness of our mutual possession. And it is not being in the world, but it is being seduced and tyrannised over by the influx of worldly desires and thoughts, surging into our hearts, that drives God from out of our hearts, and draws us away from the sweet security of being possessed by, and living close to, Him. Death does a great deal for a man in advancing him in the scale of being, and in changing the centre of gravity, as it were, of this life. But there is no reason to believe that anything in death, or beyond it, will so alter the set and direction of his soul as that it will lead him into that possession of God, and being possessed by Him, which he has not here. There are many of us who, if we were to die this instant, would no more have God for ours, or belong to God, than we do now. It is our fault if the circle is broken into so many segments, if the moments of mutual love, communion, and indwelling are so rare and interrupted in our lives. The incompleteness which is due to our earthly condition is nothing as compared with the incompleteness which is due to our own sin.

But this incompleteness is one which may be progressively diminished, and we may be tending moment by moment, and year by year, nearer and nearer, and ever nearer, to the unreachable ideal of the entire possession of, and being possessed by, our God. There is a continual process of redemption of 'God's own possession' going on if a Christian man is true to himself and to that Divine Spirit which is the 'earnest' of the 'inheritance.' Mark that in my text, as it stands in our Bibles, and reads 'until the redemption,' there seems to be merely a pointing onwards to a future epoch, but that, in the more accurate rendering which you will find in the Revised Version, instead of 'until' we have '*unto*,' and that teaches us that the Divine Spirit, which in one aspect is the 'earnest of the inheritance,' is also operating upon men's hearts and minds so as to bring about the gradual completion of the process of redemption.

So, dear brethren, seeing that by our own faults the possession is incomplete, and seeing that in the incompleteness there is given to each of us, if we rightly use it, a mighty power which is working ever towards the completion, it becomes us day by day to draw into our spirits more and more of that divine influence, and to let it work more fully upon the sins and faults which, far more than the body of flesh, or the connection with the world which it brings about, are the reasons for the incompleteness of the possession. We have, if we are wise, the task to discharge of daily enclosing, so to speak, more and more of the broad land which is all given over to us for our inheritance, but of which only so much as we fence in and cultivate, and make our own, is our own.

The incompleteness is progressively completed, and it is our work as much as God's work to complete it. For though in our text that redemption is conceived of as a divine act, it is not an act in which we are but passive. The air goes into the lungs, and that oxygenates the blood, but the lung has to inflate if the air is to penetrate all its vesicles. And so the Spirit which seals us unto the redemption of the possession has to be received, held, diffused throughout, and utilised by our own effort.

II. Now, secondly, notice the certainty of the completion of the incompleteness.

As I have already said, the clod of earth and the handful of grass, the servant's wages, the soldier's shilling, are all guarantees that the whole of the inheritance or of the pay will be forthcoming in due time. And so there emerges from this consideration of the Divine Spirit as the 'earnest,' the thought that the present experiences of a Christian soul are the surest proofs, and the irrefragable guarantees, of that perfect future. We ask for proofs of a future life. They may be very useful in certain states of mind, and to certain phases of opinion, but as it seems to me, far deeper than the region of logical understanding, and far more conclusive than anything that can be cast into the form of a syllogism, is the experience of a soul which knows that God is its, and that it is God's. 'I think, therefore, I am,' said the philosopher. 'I have God; therefore I shall always be,' says the Christian. Whilst that evidence is available only for himself, it is absolutely conclusive for himself. And the fact that it does spring in the hearts which are purest, because nearest God, is no small matter to be considered by men who may be groping for proofs of a life to come. If the selected moments of the purest devotion here on earth bring with them inevitably the confidence of the unending continuance of that communion, then those who do not believe in that future have to account for the fact as best they may. As for us who do know, though brokenly, and by reason of our own faults very imperfectly, what it is to have God, and be had by Him, we do not need to travel out to dim and doubtful analogies, nor do we even depend entirely upon the fact of a risen Christ ascended to the heavens, and living evermore, but we can say, 'I am God's; God is mine, and death has no power over such a mutual possession.'

The very incompleteness adds strength to the assurance, for the facts of the Christian life are such as to demand, both by its greatness and by its littleness, by its loftiness and by its lapses into lowliness, by the floodtide of devotion that sometimes sweeps rejoicingly over the mud-shoals and by the ebb that sometimes leaves them all black and festering, a future life wherein what was manifestly meant to be, and capable of being, dominant, supreme, but was hampered and hindered here, shall reach its full development, and where the plant that was dwarfed in this alien soil, transplanted into that higher house, shall blossom and bear immortal fruits. The new moon has a ragged edge, and each of the protrusions and concavities are the prophecy of the perfect orb which shall ere long fill the night with calm light from its silvery shield. The incompleteness prophesies completion.

And if the incompleteness is so blessed, what will the completeness be? A shilling to a million pounds, Knowledge which is partial and intermittent, like the twilight, as contrasted with the blaze of noonday, Joy like winter sunshine as compared with the warmth and heat of the midday sun at the zenith on the Equator. The 'earnest' of the 'inheritance' is wealth; the inheritance itself shall be unaccountable treasure.

III. And so, lastly, a word about the completion of the possession.

The 'earnest' is always of the same nature as, and a part of the 'inheritance.' Therefore, since the Holy Spirit is the earnest, the conclusion is plain, that the inheritance is nothing less than God Himself. Heaven is to possess God, and to be possessed by Him. That is the highest conception that we can form of that future life. And it is sorely to be lamented that subsidiary conceptions, which are all useful in their subordinate places, have, by popular Christianity, been far too much elevated into being the central blessedness of that future heaven. It is all right that we should cast the things which it is 'impossible for men to utter' into the shape of symbols which may a little relieve the necessary inarticulateness; but golden streets, and crystal pavements, and white robes, and golden palms, and all such representations, are but the dimmest shadows of that which they intend to express, and do often, as is the vice of all symbols, obscure. We can only conceive of a condition of which we have had no experience, by the two ways of symbolism and of negation. We can say, 'There shall be no night there; there shall be no curse there; they need no candle, neither light of the sun; they rest not day nor night; there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away.' But all these negations, like their sister symbols, are but surface work, and we have to go deeper than all of them.

But to possess God, and to be possessed by Him, and in either case fully, perfectly in degree, progressively in measure, eternal in duration, is the Heaven of heaven.

If that is the true conception of the inheritance, then it follows indubitably that such a Heaven is not for everybody. God would fain have us all for His there, as He would fain have each of us here and now, but it may not be. There are creatures which live beneath stones, and if you turn their coverings up, and let light fall on them, it kills them. And there are men who have refused to belong to God here, and refused to claim their portion in Him, and such cannot possess that true Heaven which is God Himself. Then, if its possession is not a mere matter of divine volition, giving a man what he is not capable of receiving, it plainly follows that the preparation must begin now and here by the incomplete possession of which my text is discoursing. And the way of such preparation is plain. The context says: 'In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.' Faith in Jesus Christ, and trust in Him and His work as my forgiveness, my acceptance, my changed nature and heart—is the condition of being 'sealed' with that Spirit whose sealing of us is the condition of our love, our surrender, and mutual indwelling, which are our possession of God and being possessed by Him, and are the condition of our future complete possession of the 'inheritance.' We must begin with faith in Christ. Then comes the sealing, then comes the earnest, then comes the growing redemption, and in due time shall come the fulness of the possession. 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ' if thou wouldst have the earnest, whilst thou dost tabernacle in tents in the wilderness of Time, and if thou wouldst have the inheritance when thou crossest the flood into the goodly land.

THE HOPE OF THE CALLING

'That ye may know what is the hope of His calling.'—EPH. i. 18.

A MAN'S prayers for others are a very fair thermometer of his own religious condition. What he asks for them will largely indicate what he thinks best for himself; and how he asks it will show the firmness of his own faith and the fervour of his own feeling. There is nothing colder than the intercession of a cold Christian; and, on the other hand, in no part of the fervid Apostle Paul's writings do his words come more winged and fast, or his spirit glow with greater fervour of affection and holy desire than in his petitions for his friends.

In that great prayer, of which my text forms a part, we have his response to the good news that had reached him of the steadfastness in faith and abundance in love of these Ephesian Christians. As the best expression of his glad love he asks for them the knowledge of three things, of which my text is the first, and the other two are the 'riches of the glory of the inheritance' and 'the exceeding greatness of God's power.'

Now if we take the 'hope' in my text, as is often done, as meaning the thing hoped for, there seems to be but a shadowy difference between the first and the second of these subjects of the apostolic petition. Whereas, if we take it as meaning, not the object on which the emotion is fixed, but the emotion itself, then all the three stand in a natural gradation and connection. We have, first, the Christian emotion; then the object upon which it is fixed; 'the glory of the inheritance'; then the power by which the latter is brought and the former is realised. We shall consider the second and third of these petitions in following sermons. For the present I confine myself to this first, the Apostle's great desire for Christians who had already made considerable progress in the Christian life, 'that they may know,' by experiencing it, 'what is the hope of His calling.'

I. Now the first thought that these words suggest to me is this, that the Christian hope is based upon the facts of Christian experience.

What does the Apostle mean by naming it 'the hope of his calling'? He means this, that the great act of the divine mercy revealed to us in the Gospel, by which God summons and invites men to Himself, will naturally produce in those who have yielded to it a hope of immortal and perfect life. Because God has called men, therefore the man who has yielded to the call may legitimately, and must, if he is to do his duty, cherish such a hope. It is clear enough that this is so, inasmuch as, unless there be a heaven of completeness for us who have yielded to the summons and obeyed the invitation of God in His Gospel, His whole procedure is enigmatical and bewildering. The fact of the call is inexplicable; the cost of it is no less so. It was not worth while for God to make the world unless with respect to another which was to follow. It is still less worth His while to redeem the world if the results of that redemption, as they are exhibited here and now, and as they are capable of being exhibited in this present condition of things, are all that are to flow from it. It was not worth Christ's while to die, it was not worth God's while to send His Son, there was no sense or consistency in that great voice that echoes from heaven, calling us to love and serve Him, unless, beyond the jangling contradictions, and imperfect attainments, and foiled aspirations, and fragmentary faith, and broken services of earth, there be a region of completeness where all that was tendency here shall have become effect; and all that was but in germ here, and sorely frostbitten by the ungenial climate, and shrivelled by the foul vapours in the atmosphere, shall blossom and burgeon into eternal life. The Christian life, as it is to-day, in its attainments and imperfections, is at once the witness of the reality of the power that has produced it, and clamantly calls for a sphere and environment in which that power shall be able to produce the effects which it is capable of producing.

God is 'not a man that He should lie, nor the son of man that He should repent.' Men begin grand designs which never get further than the paper that they are drawn on; or they build a porch, and then they are bankrupt, or change their minds, or die, and the palace remains unrealised, and all that pass by mock and say, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.' But God's designs are certain of accomplishment. Unless we are to be reduced to a state of utter intellectual bewilderment and confusion, and forgo our belief in His veracity and resources to execute His designs, the design that lies in the calling must needs lead on to the realm of perfectness. If we consider the agent by which it is effected, even the risen Christ; if we consider the cost at which it was accomplished, even the death on the Cross, the mission of His Son, and His assumption of the limitations of an incarnate life; if we consider the manifest potencies of the power that He has brought into operation in the present Christian life; and if we consider, side by side with these, the stark, staring contradictions and as manifest inevitable limitations of the effects of that power, His calling carries in its depths the assurance that what He means shall be done, that Jesus Christ has not died in vain, that He has not ascended to fill a solitary throne, but is the Firstfruits of a great harvest; and that we shall one day be all that it is in the gospel of our salvation to make us, unhindered by the limitations and unthwarted by the antagonisms of this poor human life of ours. Unless there be a heaven in which all desires shall be satisfied, all evils removed, all good perfected, all ragged trees made symmetrical and full-grown, and all souls that love Him radiant with His own perfect image, then the light that seemed a light from heaven is the most delusive of all the marsh-fires of earth, and nothing in the illusions of sense or of men's cunning is so cruel or so tragic as the calling that seemed to be the voice of God, and summoned us to a heaven which was only a dream.

II. And so, secondly, notice how this hope of our text is in some sense the very topstone of the Christian life.

Paul has heard, concerning these people in Ephesus, of their faith and love. And because he has heard of these, therefore he brings this prayer. These two—the faith which apprehends the manifestation of God in Jesus Christ, and the love which that faith produces in the heart that accepts the revelation of the infinite love—are crowned by, and are imperfect without, and naturally lead on to the brightness of this great hope. Faith—the reliance of the spirit upon the veracity of the revealing God—gives hope its contents; for the Christian hope is not spun out of your own imaginations, nor is it the mere making objective in a future life of the unfulfilled desires of this disappointing present, but it is the recognition by the trusting spirit of the great and starry truths that are flashed upon it by the Word of God. Faith draws back the curtain, and Hope gazes into the supernal abysses. My hope, if it be anything else than the veriest will-o'-the-wisp and delusion, is the answer of my heart to the revealed truth of God.

Similarly the love which flows from faith not only necessarily leads on to the expectation of union being perfected with the object of its warm affection, but also so works upon the heart and character as that the false and seducing loves which draw away, like some sluice upon a river, the current of life from its true channel, are all sanctified and no more hinder hope. Loving, we hope for that which, unless we loved, would not draw desires nor yield foretastes of sweetness which, like perfumed oil, feed the pure flame of hope.

The triad of Christian graces is completed by Hope. Without her fair presence something is wanting to the completeness of her elder sisters. The great Campanile at Florence, though it be inlaid with glowing marbles, and fair sculptures, and perfect in its beauty wants the gilded, skyward-pointing pinnacle of its top most pyramid; and so it stands incomplete. And thus faith and love need for their crowning and completion the topmost grace that looks up to the sky, and is sure of a mansion there.

Brethren, our Christianity is wofully imperfect unless faith and love find their acme, their outstretching completion, in this Christian hope. Do you seek to complete your faith and love by a living hope full of immortality?

III. Thirdly, notice how this hope is an all-important element in the Christian life.

The Apostle asks for it as the best thing that can befall these Ephesian Christians, as the one thing that they need to make them strong and good and blessed. There are many other aspects of desire for them which appear in other parts of this letter. But here all Christian progress is regarded as being held in solution and included in vigorous hope.

Why is the activity of hope thus important for Christian life? Because it stimulates effort, calms sorrows, takes the fascination out of temptations, supplies a new aim for life and a new measure for the things of time and sense.

If we lived, as we ought to live, in the habitual apprehension of the great future awaiting all real Christians, would it not change the whole aspect of life? The world is very big when it is looked at from any point upon its surface; but suppose it could be looked at from the central sun, how large would it appear then? We can shift our station in like fashion, and then we get the true measure at once of the insignificance and of the greatness of life. This world means nothing worthy, except as an introduction to another. Not that thereby there will follow in any wise man contempt for the present, for the very same reference to the future which dwarfs the greatnesses and dwindles the sorrows, and almost extinguishes the dazzling lights of this present, does also lift it to its true significance and importance. It is the vestibule of that future, and that future is conditioned throughout by the results of the few years that we live here. An apprenticeship may be a very poor matter, looked at in itself; and the boy may say What is the use of my working at all these trivial things? but, since it is apprenticeship, it is worth while to attend to every trifle in its course, for attention to them will affect the standing of the man all his days.

Here and now we are getting ready for the great workshop yonder; learning the trick of the tools, and how to use our fingers and our powers, and, when the schooling is done, we shall be set to nobler work, and receive ample wages for the years here. Because that great 'to-morrow will be as this day' of earthly life, 'and much more abundant,' therefore it is no trifle to work amongst the trifles; and nothing is small which may tell on our condition yonder. The least deflection from the straight line, however acute may be the angle which the divergent lines enclose at the starting, and however small may seem to be the deviation from parallelism, will, if prolonged to infinity, have room between the two for all the stars.

and the distance between them will be that the one is in heaven and the other is in hell. And so it is a great thing to live amongst the little things, and life gains its true significance when we dwarf and magnify it by linking it with the world to come.

If we only kept that hope bright before us, how little discomforts and sorrows and troubles would matter! Life would become 'a solemn scorn of ills.' It does not matter much what kind of cabin accommodation we have if we are only going a short voyage; the main thing is to make the port. If we, as Christian people, cherish, as we ought to do, this great hope, then we shall be able to control, and not to despise but to exalt this fleeting and transient scene, because it is linked inseparably with the life that is to come.

IV. Lastly, this hope needs enlightened eyes.

The Apostle prays that God may give to these Ephesians 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,' and then he adds, as the result of that gift, the desire that the Ephesian believers may have 'the eyes of their hearts enlightened.' That is a remarkable expression. It does not mean, as an English reader might suppose it to mean, that the affections are the agents by which this knowledge reaches us; but 'heart' is here used, as it often is in Scripture, as a general expression for the whole inward life, and all that the Apostle means is that, by the gift of the Divine Spirit of wisdom, a man's inner nature may be so touched as to be capable of perceiving and grasping the 'hope of the calling.'

Observe, too, the language, 'that ye may know the hope.' How can you *know* a hope? How do you know any kind of feeling? By having it. The only way of knowing what is the hope is to hope, and this is only possible by dint of these eyes of the understanding being enlightened. For our inward nature, as we have it, and as we use it, without the touch of that Divine Spirit, is so engrossed with this present that the far-off blessedness to which my text refers has no chance of entering there. No man can look at something beside him with one eye, and at something half a mile off with the other. You have to focus the eye according to the object; and he who is gazing upon the near is thereby made blind to that which is afar off. If we go crawling along the low levels with our eyes upon the dust, then of course we cannot see the crown above.

We need more than the historical revelation of the light in order to enlighten the inward nature. There is many a man here now who knows all about the immortality that is brought to light by Jesus Christ just as well as the Christian man whose soul is full of the hope of it, and who yet, for all his knowledge, does not know the hope, because he has not felt it. You have to get further than to the acceptance intellectually of the historical facts of a risen and ascended Saviour before there can be, in your heart, any vital hope of immortality. The inward eye must be cleared and strengthened, cross lights must be shut out so that we may direct the single eye of our hearts towards the great objects which alone are worthy of its fixed contemplation. And we cannot do that without a divine help, that Spirit of wisdom which will fill our hearts if we ask for it, which will fix our affections, which will clear our eyesight, which will withdraw it from seeing vanity as well as give it reality to see.

But we must observe the conditions. Since this clearness of hope comes not merely from the acceptance as a truth of the fact of Christ's Resurrection and Ascension, but comes through the gift of that Divine Spirit, then to have it you must ask for it. Christian people, do you ask for it? Do you ever pray—I do not mean in words, but in real desire—that God would help you to keep steadily before you that great future to which we are all going so fast? If you do you will get the answer. Seek for that Spirit; use it, and do not resist its touches. Do not fix your gaze on the world when God is trying to draw you to fix it upon Himself. Think more about Jesus Christ, more about God's high calling, live nearer to Him, and try more honestly, more earnestly, more prayerfully, more habitually, even amidst all the troubles and difficulties and trivialities of each day, to cultivate that great faculty of joyful and assured hope.

Surely God did not endue us with the power of hoping that we might fling it all away on trivial, transient things. We are all far too short-sighted; our fault is not that we do not hope, but that we hope for such near things, for such small things, like the old mariners who had no compass nor sextant, and were obliged to creep timidly along the coasts, and steer from headland to headland. But we ought to launch boldly out into mid-ocean, knowing that we have before us that star that cannot guide us amiss. Do not set your hopes on the things that perish, for if you do, hopes fulfilled and hopes disappointed will be equally bitter in your mouths. And you older people who, like myself, are drawing near the end of your days, and have little else left to hope for in this world, do you see to it that your anticipations extend 'above the ruinable skies.' *There* is an object beyond experience, above imagination, without example, for which the creation wants a comparison, we an apprehension, and the Word of God itself a sufficient revelation. 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' God hath called us to His eternal kingdom and glory; let us seek to walk in the light of the 'hope of His calling.'

GOD'S INHERITANCE IN THE SAINTS

'That ye may know what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.'—EPH. i. 18.

THE misery of Hope is that it so often owes its materials to the strength of our desires or to the activity of our imagination. But when mere wishes or fancies spin the thread, Hope cannot weave a lasting fabric. And so one of the old prophets, in speaking of the delusive hopes of man, says that they are like 'spiders' webs,' and 'shall not become garments.' Paul, then, having been asking for these Ephesian Christians that they might have hopes lofty and worthy, and such as God's summons to them would inspire, passes on to ask that they might have the material out of which they could weave such hope, namely, a sure and clear knowledge of the future blessings. The language in which he describes that future is remarkable—'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' He calls it God's inheritance, not as meaning that God is the Inheritor, but the Giver. He speaks of it as 'in the saints,' meaning that, just as the land of Canaan was distributed amongst tribes and families, and each man got his own little plot, so that broad land is parted out amongst those who are 'partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.'

And so my text suggests to me three points to which I seek to call your attention. First, the inheritance; second, the heirs; and third, the heirs' present knowledge of their future possession.

I. First, then, note the inheritance.

Now we must discharge from the word some of its ordinary associations. There is no reference to the thought of succession in it, as the mere English reader is accustomed to think—to whom inheritance means possession by the death of another. The idea is simply that of possession. The figure which underlies the word is, of course, that of the ancient partition of the land of Canaan amongst the tribes, but we must go a great deal deeper than that in order to understand its whole sweep and fulness of meaning.

What is the portion for a soul? God. God is Heaven, and Heaven is God. No interpretation of 'the inheritance,' however it may run into cheap and vulgar sensuous descriptions of a future glory, has come within sight of the meaning of the word, unless it has grasped this as the central thought: 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee.' Only God can be the portion of a human spirit. And none else can fill the narrowest and the smallest of man's needs.

So, then, if there were realised all the accumulated changes of progress in blessedness, and the withdrawal of all external causes of disquiet and weariness and weeping, still the heart would hunger and be empty of its true possession unless God Himself had flowed into it. It were but a poor advancement and the gain of a loss, if yearnings were made immortal, and the aching vacuity, which haunts every soul that is parted from God, were cursed with immortality. It would be so, if it be not true that the inheritance is nothing less than the fuller possession of God Himself.

And how do men possess God? How do we possess one another, here and now? By precisely the same way, only indefinitely expanded and exalted, do we possess Him here, and shall we possess Him hereafter. Heart to heart is joined by love which is mutual and interpenetrating possession; where 'mine' and 'thine' become blended, like the several portions of the one ray of white light, in the blessed word 'ours.' Contemplation makes us possessors of God. Assimilation to His character makes us own and have Him. They who love and gaze, and are being changed by still degrees into His likeness, possess Him. This is the central idea of man's future destiny and highest blessedness, a union with God closer and more intimate in degree, but yet essentially the same in kind, as is here possible amidst the shows and vanities and wearinesses of this mortal life. 'His servants shall serve Him, and see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads.' Obedience, contemplation, transformation, these are the hands by which we here lay hold on God; and they in the heavens grasp Him just as we here on earth may do. The 'inheritance' is God Himself.

Surely that is in accordance with the whole teaching of Scripture, and is but the expansion of plain words which tell us that we 'are heirs of God.' If that be so, then all the other subsidiary blessings which have been, to the sore detriment of Christian anticipation and of Christian life in a hundred ways, elevated into disproportionate importance, fall into their right places, and are more when they are looked upon as secondary than when they are looked upon as primary.

Ah, brethren! neither the sensuous metaphors which, in accommodation to our weakness, Scripture has used to paint that future so that we may, in some measure, comprehend it, nor the translation of these, in so far as they refer to circumstances and externals, are enough for us. It is blessed to know that 'there shall be no night there'—blessed to grasp all those sweet negatives which contradict the miseries of the world, and to think of no sin, no curse, no tears, no sighing nor sorrow, neither any more pain, 'because the former things have passed away.' It is sweet and ennobling to think that, when we are discharged of the load of this cumbrous flesh, we shall be much more ourselves, and able to see where now is but darkness, and to feel where now is but vacancy. It is blessed to think of the recognising of lost and loved ones. But all these blessednesses, heaped together, as it seems to me, would become sickeningly the same if prolonged through eternity, unless we had God for our very own. *Eternal* is an awful word, even when the noun that goes with it is *blessedness.* And I know not how even the redeemed could be saved, as the long ages rolled on, from the oppression of monotony, and the feeling, 'I would not live always,' unless God was 'the strength of their hearts, and their portion for ever.' We must rise above everything that merely applies to changes in our own natures and in our relations to the external universe, and to other orders of creatures; and grasp, as the hidden sweetness that lies in the calyx of the gorgeous flower, the possession of God Himself as the rapture of our joy and the heaven of our heaven.

And if that be so, then these accumulated words with which the Apostle, in his fiery, impetuous way, tries to set forth the greatness of what he is speaking about, receive a loftier meaning than they otherwise would have.

'The riches of the glory of His inheritance'—now that word 'riches,' or 'wealth,' is a favourite of Paul's; and in this single letter occurs, if I count rightly, five times. In addition to our text, it is used twice in connection with God's grace, 'the riches of His grace' once in connection with Jesus, 'the unsearchable riches of Christ'; and once in a similar connection to, though with a different application from, our text, 'the riches of His glory.' Always, you see, it is applied to something that is special and properly divine. And here, therefore, it applies, not to the abundance of any creatural good, however exuberant and inexhaustible the store of it may be, but simply and solely to that unwearying energy, that self-feeding and ever-burning and never-decaying light, which is God. Of Him alone it can be said that work does not exhaust, nor Being tend to its own extinction, nor expenditure of resources to their diminution. The guarantee for eternal blessedness is the 'riches' of the eternal God, and so we may be sure that no time can exhaust, nor any expenditure empty, either His storehouse or our wealth.

And again, the 'glory' is not the lustrous light, however dazzling to our feeble eyes that may be, of any creature that reflects the light of God, but it is the far-flashing and never-dying radiance of His own manifestation of Himself to the hearts and souls of them that love Him. And so the 'inheritance is incorruptible and undefiled, and fadeth not away'; not merely by reason of the communicated will of God operating upon creatures whom He preserves untarnished by corruption, and ungnawed by decay, but because He Himself is the 'inheritance,' and on Him time hath no power. On His wealth all His creatures may hang for ever; and it shall be as it was in the sweet parable of the miracle of old, the fragments that remain will be more than when the meal began. 'The riches of the glory of His inheritance.'

II. Now notice, secondly, the heirs.

The words of my text receive, perhaps, their best commentary and explanation in those words which the writer of them heard, on the Damascus road, when the voice from heaven spoke to him about men 'obtaining an inheritance among them that are sanctified.' It almost sounds like an echo of that long past, but never-to-be-forgotten voice, when our Apostle writes as he does in our text.

Now what does he mean by 'saints'? Who are these amongst whom the broad acres of that infinite prairie are to be parted out? The word has attracted to itself contemptuous meanings and ascetical meanings, and meanings which really deny the true democracy of Christianity and the equality of all believers in the sight of God. But its scriptural use has none of these narrowing and confusing associations adhering to it, nor does it even directly and at first mean, as we generally take it to mean, pure men, holy in the sense of clean and righteous. But something goes before that phase of meaning, and it is this—a saint is a man separated and set apart for God, as His property. That is the true meaning of the word. It is its meaning as it is applied to the vessels of the Temple, the priests, the services, and the altar. It is its meaning, only with the necessary substitution of spirit for body, as it is applied in the New Testament as a designation co-extensive with that of believers.

How does a man belong to God?

We asked a minute or two ago how God belonged to men. The answer to the converse question is almost identical. A man belongs to God by the affection of his heart, by the submission of his will, by the reference of his actions to Him; and he who thus belongs to God, in the same act in which he gives himself to God, receives God as his possession. The thing must be reciprocal. 'All mine is Thine'; and God answers, 'And all Mine is thine.' He ever meets our 'O Lord, I yield myself to Thee,' with His 'And My child, I give Myself to thee.' It is so in regard of our earthly loves. It is so in regard of our relations to Him. And that being the case, purity, which is generally taken by careless readers as being the main idea of sanctity, will follow this self-surrender, which is the basis of all goodness, everywhere and always.

If that be true, and I do not think it can be effectively denied, then the next step is a very plain one, and that is that for the perfect possession of God, which is heaven, the same thing is needed in its perfection which is required for the partial possession of Him that makes the Christian life of earth. And just as here we get Him for ours in proportion as we give up ourselves to be His, so yonder the inheritance belongs, and can only belong to, 'the saints.' So, then, one can see that there is nothing arbitrary in this limitation of a possession, which in its very nature cannot go beyond the bounds which are thus marked out for it. If heaven were the vulgar thing that some of you think it, if that future life were desirable simply because you escaped from some external punishment and got all sorts of outward blessings and joys, felicities and advantages, hung round the neck, or pinned upon the breast, as they do to successful fighters, why then, of course, there might be partiality in the distribution of the decorations. But if that possession hinges upon our yielding ourselves to Him, then there is not an arbitrary link in the whole chain. Faith is set forth as the condition of heaven, because faith is the means of union with Christ, by and from whom alone we draw the motives for self-surrender and the power for sanctity. You cannot have heaven unless you have God. That is step number one. You cannot have God unless you have 'holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.' That is step number two. You cannot have holiness without faith. That is step number three. 'An inheritance among them that are sanctified'; and then there is added, 'by faith which is in Me.'

It is clear, too, what a fatal delusion some of us are under who think that we shall, and fancy that we should like to, as we say, 'go to heaven when we die.' Why, heaven is here, round about you, a present heaven in the imitation of God, in the practice of righteousness, in the cultivation of dependence upon Him, in the yielding of yourselves up to Him. Heaven is here, and by your own choice you stop outside of it. There must be a correspondence between environment and nature for blessedness. 'The mind is its own place,' as the great Puritan poet taught us, 'and makes a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.' Fishes die on the shore, and the man that drew them out dies in the water. Gills cannot breathe where lungs are useful, and lungs cannot, where gills come into play. If you have not here and now the holiness which knits you to God, and gives you possession of Him, you would not like 'heaven,' if it were possible to carry you to that place, in so far as it is a place. It is rather strange, if you hope to go to heaven when you die, that you should be very unwilling to spend a little time in it whilst you are alive, and that you should expect blessedness then from that presence of God which brings you no blessedness now.

III. Lastly, we have here the heirs' present knowledge of their future blessedness.

The Apostle asks that these men may know a thing that clearly seems unknowable. It is an impossible petition, we might be ready to say, because it is clear enough that there can be no true knowledge of the conditions and details of that future life. The dark mountains that lie between us and it hide their secret well, and few or no stray beams have reached us. An unborn babe, or a chrysalis in a hole in the ground or in a chink of a tree, might think as wisely about its future condition as we can do about that life beyond. There can be no knowledge until there is experience.

What, then, does Paul mean by framing such a petition as this? The answer is found in noticing that the knowledge which he is imploring here is a consequence of a previous knowledge. For, in a former verse, he prays that these men may have 'the spirit of wisdom in the knowledge of God'; and when they have got the knowledge of God he thinks that they will have got the knowledge of 'the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' Now, turn that into other words, and it is just this, that the knowledge of God, which comes by faith and love here, is in kind so identical with the fullest and loftiest riches of the knowledge of Him hereafter, that, if we have the one, we are not without the other. The one is in germ, the other, no doubt, full blown; the one is the twinkling of the rushlight, as it were, the other is the blaze of the sunshine. The two states of being are so correspondent that from the one we draw our clearest knowledge of the other. There are telescopes, in using which you do not look up when you want to see the stars, but down on to a reflecting mirror, and there you see them. Such a reflecting mirror, though it be sometimes muddied and dimmed and always very small, are the experiences of the Christian soul here.

So, dear friends, if we want to know as much as may be known of the blessedness of heaven, let us seek to possess as much as may be possessed of the knowledge and love of God on earth. Then we shall know the centre, at any rate; and that is light, though the circumference may be very dark. Much will remain obscure. That is of very small consequence to Hope, which does not need information half so much as it needs assurance. Like some flower in the cranny of the rock, it can spread a broad bright blossom on little soil, if only it be firmly rooted.

The path for us all is plain. Come to Jesus Christ as sinful men, and take what He has given, who has given Himself for us. Touched by His love, let us love Him back again, and yield ourselves to Him, and He will give Himself to us. They who can say, 'O Lord! I am Thine,' are sure to hear from heaven, 'I am thine.' And they who possess, in being possessed by, God Himself, do not need to die in order to go to heaven, but are at least doorkeepers in the house of the Lord now, and stand where they can see into the inner sanctuary which they will one day tread. A life of faith brings Heaven to us, and thereby gives us the surest and the clearest knowledge of what we shall be, and have, when we are brought to heaven.

THE MEASURE OF IMMEASURABLE POWER

'That ye may know . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ.'—EPH. i. 19, 20.

'THE riches of the glory of the inheritance' will sometimes quench rather than stimulate hope. He can have little depth of religion who has not often felt that the transcendent glory of that promised future sharpens the doubt—'and can *I* ever hope to reach it?' Our paths are strewn with battlefields where we were defeated; how should we expect the victor's wreath? And so Paul does not think that he has asked all which his friends in Ephesus need when he has asked that they may know the hope and the inheritance. There is something more wanted, something more even for our knowledge of these, and that is the knowledge of the power which alone can fulfil the hope and bring the inheritance. His language swells and peals and becomes exuberant and noble with his theme. He catches fire, as it were, as he thinks about this power that worketh in us. It is 'exceeding.' Exceeding what? He does not tell us, but other words in this letter, in the other great prayer which it contains, may help us to supply the missing words. He speaks of the 'love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' and of God being 'able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think.' The power which is really at work in Christian men to-day is in its nature properly transcendent and immeasurable, and passes thought and desire and knowledge.

And yet it has a measure. 'According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.' Is that heaping together of synonyms or all but synonyms, mere tautology? Surely not. Commentators tell us that they can distinguish differences of meaning between the words, in that the first of them is the more active and outward, and the last of them is the more inward. And so they liken them to fruit and branch and root; but we need simply say that the gathering together of words so nearly co-extensive in their meaning is witness to the effort to condense the infinite within the bounds of human tongue, to speak the unspeakable; and that these reiterated expressions, like the blows of the billows that succeed one another on the beach, are hints of the force of the infinite ocean that lies behind.

And then the Apostle, when he has once come in sight of his risen Lord, as is his wont, is swept away by the ardour of his faith and the clearness of his vision, and breaks from his purpose in order to dilate on the glories of his King. We do not need to follow him into that. I limit myself now to the words which I have read as my text, with only such reference to the magnificent passage which succeeds as may be necessary for the exposition of this.

I. So, then, I ask you to look, first, at the measure and example of the immeasurable power that works in Christian men.

'According to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ'—the Resurrection, the Ascension, the session at the right hand of

God, the rule over all creatures, and the exaltation above all things on earth or in the heavens—these are the facts which the Apostle brings before us as the pattern-works, the *chefs-d'œuvre* of the power that is operating in all Christians. The present glories of the ascended Christ are glories possessed by a Man, and, that being so, they are available as evidences and measures of the power which works in believing souls. In them we see the possibilities of humanity, the ideal for man which God had when He created and breathed His blessing upon him. It is one of ourselves who has strength enough to bear the burden of the glory, one of ourselves who can stand within the blaze of encircling and indwelling Divinity and be unconsumed. The possibilities of human nature are manifest there. If we want to know what the Divine Power can make of us, let us turn to look with the eye of faith upon what it has made of Jesus Christ.

But such a thought, glorious as it is, still leaves room for doubt as to my personal attainment of such an ideal. Possibility is much, but we need solid certainty. And we find it in the truth that the bond between Christ and those who truly love and trust Him is such as that the possibility must become a reality and be consolidated into a certainty. The Vine and its branches, their Head and the members, the Christ and His Church, are knit together by such closeness of union as that wheresoever and whatsoever the one is, there and that must the others also be. Therefore, when doubts and fears, and consciousness of our own weakness, creep across us, and all our hopes are dimmed, as some star in the heavens is, when a light mist floats between us and it, let us turn away to Him our brother, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, and think that He, in His calm exaltation and regal authority and infinite blessedness, is not only the pattern of what humanity may be, but the pledge of what His Church must be. 'Where I am, there shall also My servant be.' 'The glory that Thou gavest Me I have given them.'

Nor is that all. Not only a possibility and a certainty for the future are for us the measure of the power that worketh in us, but as this same letter teaches us, we have, as Christians, a present scale by which we may estimate the greatness of the power. For in the next chapter, after that glorious burst as to the dignity of his Lord, which we have not the heart to call a digression, the Apostle, recurring to the theme of my text, goes on to say, 'And you hath He quickened,' and then, catching it up again a verse or two afterwards, he reiterates, clause by clause, what had been done on Jesus as having been done on us Christians. If that Divine Spirit raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, it is as true that the same power hath 'raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' And so not only the far-off, though real and brilliant, and eye and heart-filling glories of the ascended Christ give us the measure of the power, but also the limited experience of the present Christian life, the fact of the resurrection from the true death, the death of sin, the fact of union with Jesus Christ so real and close as that they who truly experience it do live, as far as the roots of their lives and the scope and the aim of them are concerned, 'in the heavens,' and 'sit with Him in heavenly places'—these things afford us the measure of the power that worketh in us

Then, because a Man is King of kings and Lord of lords; and because He who is our Life 'is exalted high above all principalities and powers'; and because from His throne He has quickened us from the death of sin, and has drawn us so near to Himself that if we are His we truly live beside Him, even whilst we stumble here in the darkness, we may know the exceeding greatness of His power, according to the working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead.

II. Secondly, notice the knowledge of the unknowable power.

We have already come across the same apparent paradox, covering a deep truth, in the former sections of this series of petitions. I need only remind you, in reference to this matter, that the knowledge which is here in question is not the intellectual perception of a fact as revealed in Scripture, but is that knowledge to which alone the New Testament gives the noble name, being knowledge verified by inward experience, and the result of one's own personal acquaintance with its object.

How do we know a power? By thrilling beneath its force. How are we to know the greatness of the power but because it comes surging and rejoicing into our aching emptiness, and lifts us buoyant above our temptations and weakness? Paul was not asking for these people theological conceptions. He was asking that their spirits might be so saturated with and immersed in that great ocean of force that pours from God as that they should never, henceforth, be able to doubt the greatness of that power which wrought in them. The knowledge that comes from experience is the knowledge that we all ought to seek. It is not merely to be desired that we should have right and just conceptions, but that we should have the vital knowledge which is, and which comes from, life eternal.

And that power, which thus we may all know by feeling it working upon ourselves, though it be immeasurable, has its measure; though it be, in its depth and fulness, unknowable and inexhaustible, may yet be really and truly known. You do not need a thunderstorm to experience the electric shock; a battery that you can carry in your pocket will do that for you. You do not need to have traversed all the length and breadth and depth and height of some newly-discovered country to be sure of its existence, and to have a real, though it may be a vague, conception of the magnitude of its shores. And so, really, though boundedly, we have the knowledge of God, and can rely upon it as valid, though partial; and similarly, by experience we have such a certified acquaintance with Him and His power as needs no enlargement to be trusted, and to become the source of blessings untold. We may see but a strip of the sky through the narrow chinks of our prison windows, and many a grating may further intercept the view, and much dust that might be cleared away may dim the glass but yet it *is* the sky that we see, and we can think of the great horizon circling round and round, and of the infinite depths above there, which neither eye nor thought can travel unwearied. Though all that we see be but an inch in breadth and a foot or two in height, yet we do see. We know the unknowable power that passeth knowledge.

And let me remind you of how large importance this knowledge of and constant reference to the measureless power manifested in Christ is for us. I believe there can be no vigorous, happy Christian life without it. It is our only refuge from pessimism and despair for the world. The old psalm said, 'Thou hast crowned Him with glory and honour, and hast given Him dominion over the works of Thy hands,' and hundreds of years afterwards the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews commented on it thus, 'We see not yet all things put under Him.' Was the old vision a dream, was it never intended to be fulfilled? Apparently so, if we take the history of the past into account, and the centuries that have passed since have done nothing to make it more probable, apart from Jesus Christ, that man will rise to the height which the Psalmist dreamed of. When we look at the exploded Utopias that fill the past; when we think of the strange and apparently fatal necessity by which evil is developed from every stage of what men call progress, and how improvement is perverted, almost as soon as effected, into another fortress of weakness and misery; when we look on the world as it is to-day, I know not whence a man is to draw bright hopes, or what is to deliver him from pessimism as his last word about himself and his fellows, except the 'working of the strength of the might which He wrought in Christ.' 'We see not yet all things put under Him'—be it so, 'but we see Jesus,' and, looking to Him, hope is possible, reasonable, and imperative.

The same knowledge is our refuge from our own consciousness of weakness. We look up, as a climber may do in some Alpine ravine, upon the smooth gleaming walls of the cliff that rises above us. It is marble, it is fair, there are lovely lands on the summit, but nothing that has not wings can get there.

We try, but slip backwards almost as much as we rise. What is to be done? Are we to sit down at the foot of the cliff, and say, 'We cannot climb, let us be content with the luscious herbage and sheltered ease below?' Yes! That is what we are tempted to say. But look! a mighty hand reaches over, an arm is stretched down, the hand grasps us, and lifts us, and sets us there.

'No man hath ascended up into heaven save He that came down from heaven,' and having returned thither stoops thence, and will lift us to Himself. I am a poor, weak creature. Yes! I am all full of sin and corruption. Yes! I am ashamed of myself every day. Yes! I am too heavy to climb, and have no wings to fly, and am bound here by chains manifold. Yes! But we know the exceeding greatness of the power, and we triumph in Him.

That knowledge should shame us into contrition, when we think of such force at our disposal, and such poor results. That knowledge should widen our conceptions, enlarge our desires, breathe a brave confidence into our hopes, should teach us to expect great things of God, and to be intolerant of present attainments whilst anything remains unattained. And it should stimulate our vigorous effort, for no man will long seek to be better, if he is convinced that the effort is hopeless.

Learn to realise the exceeding greatness of the power that will clothe your weakness. 'Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, for that He is strong in might, not one faileth.' That is wonderful, but here is a far nobler operation of the divine power. It is great to 'preserve the ancient heavens' fresh and strong by His might, but it is greater to come down to my weakness, to 'give power to the faint,' and 'increase strength to them that have no might.' And that is what He will do with us.

III. Lastly, notice the conditions for the operations of the power.

'To usward who believe,' says Paul. He has been talking to these Ephesians, and saying 'ye,' but now, by that 'us,' he places himself beside them, identifies himself with them, and declares that all his gifts and strength come to him on precisely the same conditions on which theirs do to them; and that he, like them, is a waiter upon that grace which God bestows on them that trust Him.

'To usward who believe.' Once more we are back at the old truth which we can never make too emphatic and plain, that the one condition of the weakest among us being strong with the strength of the Lord is simple trust in Him, verified, of course, by continuance and by effort.

How did the water go into the Ship Canal at Eastham last week? First of all they cut a trench, and then they severed the little strip of land between the hole and the sea, and the sea did the rest. The wider and deeper the opening that we make in our natures by our simple trust in God, the fuller will be the rejoicing flood that pours into us. There is an old story about a Christian father, who, having been torturing himself with theological speculations about the nature of the Trinity, fell asleep and dreamed that he was emptying the ocean with a thimble! Well, you cannot empty it with a thimble, but you can go to it with one, and, if you have only a thimble in your hand, you will only bring away a thimbleful. The measure of your faith is the measure of God's power given to you.

There are two measures of the immeasurable power—the one is that infinite limit, of 'the power which He wrought in Christ,' and the other the practical limit. The working measure of our spiritual life is our faith. In plain English, we can have as much of God as we want. We do have as much as we want. And if, in touch with the power that can shatter a universe, we only get a little thrill that is scarcely perceptible to ourselves, and all unnoticed by others, whose fault is that? If, coming to the fountain that laughs at drought, and can fill a universe with its waters, we scarcely bear away a straitened drop or two, that barely refreshes our parched lips, and does nothing to stimulate the growth of the plants of holiness in our gardens, whose fault is that? The practical measure of the power is for us the measure of our belief and desire. And if we only go to Him, as I pray we all may, and continue there, and ask from Him strength, according to the riches that are treasured in Jesus Christ, we shall get the old answer, 'According to your faith be it unto you.'

THE RESURRECTION OF DEAD SOULS

'God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.'

EPH. ii. 4, 5.

SCRIPTURE paints man as he is, in darker tints, and man as he may become, in brighter ones, than are elsewhere found. The range of this portrait painter's palette is from pitchiest black to most dazzling white, as of snow smitten by sunlight. Nowhere else are there such sad, stern words about the actualities of human nature; nowhere else such glowing and wonderful ones about its possibilities. This Physician knows that He can cure the worst cases, if they will take His medicine, and is under no temptation to minimise the severity of the symptoms or the fatality of the disease. We have got both sides in my text; man's actual condition, 'dead in trespasses'; man's possible condition, and the actual condition of thousands of men—made to live again in Jesus Christ, and with Him raised from the dead, and with Him gone up on high, and with Him sitting at God's right hand. That is what you and I may be if we will; if we will not, then we must be the other.

So there are three things here to look at for a few moments—the dead souls; the pitying love that looks down upon them; and the resurrection of the dead.

I. First, here is a picture, a dogmatic statement if you like, about the actual condition of human nature apart from Jesus Christ—'Dead in trespasses.'

The Apostle looks upon the world—many-coloured, full of activity, full of intellectual stir, full of human emotions, affections, joys, sorrows, fluctuations—as if it were one great cemetery, and on every gravestone there were written the same inscription. They all died of the same disease—'dead *through* sin,' as the original more properly means.

Now, I dare say many who are listening to me are saying in their hearts, 'Oh! Exaggeration! The old gloomy, narrow view of human nature cropping up again.' Well, I am not at all unwilling to acknowledge that truths like this have very often been preached both with a tone and in a manner that repels, and which is rightly chargeable with exaggeration and undue gloom and narrowness. But let me remind you that it is not the Evangelical preacher nor the Apostle only who have to bear the condemnation of exaggeration, if this representation of my text be not true to facts, but it is Jesus Christ too; for He says, 'Except ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you.' And I think that be He divine or not divine, His words about the religious condition of men go so surely to the mark that a man must be tolerably impregnable in his self-conceit who charges *Him* with narrowness and exaggeration. At all events, I am content to say after Him, and I pray that you and I, when we accept Him as our Teacher, may take not only His gracious, but His stern, words, assured that a deep graciousness lies in these, too, if we rightly understand them.

Let me remind you that the phrase of my text is by no means confined to Christian teachers, but that, in common speech, we hear from all high thinkers about the lower type of humanity being dead to the loftier thoughts in which they live and move and have their being. It has passed into a commonplace of language to speak of men being 'dead to honour,' 'dead to shame,' 'dead' to this, that, and the other good and noble and gracious thing. And the same metaphor, if you like, lies here in my text—that men who have given their wills and inmost natures over to the dominion of self—and that is the definition of sin—that such men are, *ipso facto*, by reason of that very surrender of themselves to their worst selves, dead on what I may call the top side of their nature, and that all that is there is atrophied and dwindling away.

Unconsciousness is one characteristic of death. And oh! as I look round I know that there are tens, and perhaps hundreds, of men and women who are all but utterly unconscious of a whole universe in which are the only realities, and to which it becomes them to have access. You live, in the physical sense, and move and have your being in God, and yet your inmost life would not be altered one hair's-breadth if there were no God at all. You pass the most resplendent instances and illustrations of His presence, His work, and you see nothing. You are blind on that side of your natures; or, as my text says, dead to the whole spiritual realm. Just as if there were a brick wall run against some man's windows so that he could see nothing out of them; so you, by your persistent adherence to the paltry present, the material, the visible, the selfish, have reared up a wall against the windows of your souls that look heavenwards; and of God, and all the lofty starry realities that cluster round Him, you are as unconscious as the corpse upon its bier is of the sunshine that plays upon its pallid features, or of the dew that falls on its stiffened limbs. Dead, because of sin—is that exaggeration? Is it exaggeration which charges all but absolute unconsciousness of spiritual realities upon worldly men like some of you?

And, then, take another illustration. Another of the signatures of death is inactivity. And oh! what faculties in some of my friends listening to me now are shrivelled and all but extinct! They are dormant, at any rate, to use another word, for the death of my text is not so absolute a death but that a resurrection is possible, and so *dormant* comes to express pretty nearly the same thing. Faculties of service, of enthusiasm, of life for God, of noble obedience to Him—what have you done with them? Left them there until they have stiffened like an unused lock, or rusted like the hinges of an unopened door; and you are as little active in all the noblest activities of spirit, which are activities in submission to and dependence upon Him, as if you were laid in your coffin with your idle hands crossed for evermore upon an unheaving breast.

There is another illustration that I may suggest for a moment. Decay is another characteristic and signature of death. And your best self, in some of you, is rotting to corruption by sin.

Ay! Dear brethren, when we think of these tragedies of suicide that are going on in thousands of men round about us to-day, it seems to me as if the metaphor and the reality were reversed; and instead of saying that my text is a violent metaphor, transferring the facts of material death and corruption to the spiritual realm, I am almost disposed to say it is the other way about, and the real death is the death of the spirit; and the outer dissolution and unconsciousness and inactivity of the material body is only a kind of parable to preach to men what are the awful invisible facts ever associated with the fact of transgression.

There are three lives possible for each of us; two of them involuntary, the third requiring our consent and effort, but all of them sustained by the same cause. The first of them is that which we call life, the activity and the consciousness of the bodily frame; and that continues as long as the power of God keeps the body in life. When He withdraws His hand there comes what the senses call death. Then there is the natural life of thinking, loving, willing, enjoying, sorrowing, and the like, and that continues as long as He who is the life and light of men breathes into them the breath of that life. And these two are lived or died largely without the man's own consent or choice.

But there is a third life, when all that lower is lifted to God, and thinking and willing and loving and enjoying and aspiring and trusting and obeying, and all these natural faculties find their home and their consecration and their immortality in Him. That life is only lived by our own will and it is the true life, and the others are, as I said, but parables, and envelopes, and vehicles, as it were, in which this life is carried, that is more precious than they. In the physical realm, separate the body from God, and it dies. In the natural conscious life, separate the soul, as we call it, from God, and it dies. And in the higher region, separate the spirit, which is the man grasping God, from God, and he dies; and that is the real death. Both the others are nothing in comparison with it.

It may co-exist with a large amount of intellectual and other forms of activity, as we see all round about us, and that makes it only the more ghastly and the sadder. You are full of energy in regard to all other subjects, but smitten into torpor about the highest; ready to live, to work, to enjoy, to think, to will, in all other directions, and utterly unconscious and unconcerned, or all but utterly unconscious and unconcerned, in regard to God.

Oh! a death which is co-existent with such feverish intensity of life as the most of you are expending all the week at your business and your daily pursuits is among the saddest of all the tragedies that angels are called upon to weep over, and that men are fools enough to enact. Brother! If the representation is a gloomy one, do not you think that it is better to ask the question—Is it a true one? than, Is it a cheerful one? I lay it upon your hearts that he that lives to God and with God is alive to the centre as well as out to the finger tips and circumference of his visible being. He that is dead to God is dead indeed whilst he lives.

II. Now, notice, in the second place, the pitying love that looks down on the cemetery.

'God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us.' Thus the great truth that is taught us here, first of all, is that that divine love of the Divine Father bends down over His dead children and cherishes them still. Oh! you can do much in separating yourselves from God through selfishness, selfwill, sensuality, or other forms of sin, but there is one thing you cannot do, you cannot prevent His loving you. If I might venture without seeming irreverent, I would point to that pathetic page in the Old Testament history where the king hears of the death, red-handed in treason, of his darling son, and careless of victory and forgetful of everything else, and oblivious that Absalom was a rebel, and only remembering that he was his boy, burst into that monotonous wail that has come down over all the centuries as the deepest expression of undying fatherly love. 'Oh! my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Oh! Absalom, my son, my son!' The name and the relationship will well up out of the Father's heart, whatever the child's crime. We are all His Absaloms, and though we are dead in trespasses and in sins, God, who is rich in mercy, bends over us and loves us with His great love.

The Apostle might well expatiate in these two varying forms of speech, both of them intended to express the same thing—'rich in mercy' and 'great in love.' For surely a love which takes account of the sin that cannot repel it, and so shapes itself into mercy, sparing, and departing from the strict line of retribution and justice, is great. And surely a mercy which refuses to be provoked by seventy times seven transgressions in an hour, not to say a day, is rich. That mercy is wider than all humanity, deeper than all sin, was before all rebellion, and will last for ever. And it is open for every soul of man to receive if he will.

But there is another point to be noticed in reference to this wonderful manifestation of the divine love looking down upon the myriads of men dead in sin, and that is that this love shapes the divine action. Mark the language of our text, in which the Apostle attributes a certain line of conduct in the divine dealings with us to the fact of His great love. Because 'He loved us' therefore He did so and so. Now about that I have only two remarks to make, and I will make them very briefly. The one is, here is a demonstration, for some of you people who do not believe in the Evangelical doctrine of an Atonement by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, that the true scriptural representation of that doctrine is not that which caricaturists have represented it—viz. that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ changed in any manner the divine heart and disposition. It is not as unfriendly critics (who, perhaps, are not to be so much blamed for their unfriendliness as for their superficiality) would have us to believe, that the doctrine of Atonement says that God loves because Christ died. But the Apostle who preached that doctrine and looked upon it as the very heart and centre of his message to the world here puts as the true sequence—Christ died because God loves. Jesus Christ said the same thing, 'God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should be saved.'

And that brings me to the second of the remarks which I wish briefly to make—viz. this, that the Divine Love, great, patient, wonderful, unrepelled by men's sin, as it is, has to adopt a process to reach its end. God by His love does not, because He cannot, raise these dead souls into a life of righteousness without Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ comes to be the channel and the medium through which the love of God may attain its end. God's pitying love, because 'He is rich in mercy,' is not turned away by man's sin; and God's pitying love, because 'He is rich in mercy,' quickens men not by a bare will, but by the mission and work of His dear Son.

III. And so that is the last thing on which I speak a word—viz. the resurrection of the dead souls.

They died of sin. That was the disease that killed them. They cannot be quickened unless the disease be conquered. Dear brethren, I have to preach—not to argue, but to preach—and to press upon each soul the individual acceptance of the Death of Jesus Christ as being for each of us, if we will trust Him, the death of our death, and the death of our sin. By His great sacrifice and sufficient oblation He has borne the sins of the world and has taken away their guilt. And in Him the inmost reality of the spiritual death, and its outermost parable of corporeal dissolution, are equally and simultaneously overcome. If you will take Him for your Lord you will rise from the death of guilt, condemnation, selfishness, and sin into a new life of liberty, sonship, consecration, and righteousness, and will never see death.

And, on the other hand, the life of Jesus Christ is available for all of us. If we will put our trust in Him, His life will pass into our deadness; He Himself will vitalise our being, dormant capacities will be quickened and brought into blessed activity, a new direction will be given to the old faculties, desires, aspirations, emotions of our nature. The will will tower into new power because it obeys. The heart will throb with a better life because it has grasped a love that cannot change and will never die. And the thinking power will be brought into living, personal contact with the personal Truth, so that whatsoever darknesses and problems may still be left, at the centre there will be light and satisfaction and peace. You will live if you trust Christ and let Him be your Life.

And if thus, by simple faith in Him, knowing that the power of His atoning death has destroyed the burden of our guilt and condemnation, and knowing the quickening influences of His constraining love as drawing us to love new things and make us new creatures, we receive into our inmost spirits 'the law of the spirit of life' which was in Christ Jesus, and are thereby made 'free from the law of sin and death,' then it is only a question of time, when the vitalising force shall flow into all the cracks and crannies of our being and deliver us wholly from the bondage of corruption in the outer as well as in the inner life; for they who have learned that Christ is the life of their lives upon earth can never cease their appropriation of the fulness of His quickening power until He has 'changed the body of their humiliation into the likeness of the body of His glory, according to the working whereby He is able to subdue even all things unto Himself.'

Brethren! He Himself has said, and His words I beseech you to remember though you forget all mine, 'He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.' 'Believest thou this?'

'THE RICHES OF GRACE'

'That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in kindness towards us in Christ Jesus.'—EPH. ii. 7.

ONE very striking characteristic of this epistle is its frequent reference to God's purposes, and what, for want of a better word, we must call His motives, in giving us Jesus Christ. The Apostle seems to rise even higher than his ordinary height, while he gazes up to the inaccessible light, and with calm certainty proclaims not only what God has done, but why He has done it. Through all the earlier portions of this letter, the things on earth are contemplated in the light of the things in heaven. The great work of redemption is illuminated by the thought of the will and meaning of God therein; for example, we read in Chapter i. that He 'hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ, according as He hath chosen us in Him,' and immediately after we read that He 'has predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of His will.' Soon after, we hear that 'He hath revealed to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself'; and that our predestination to an inheritance in Christ is 'according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will.'

Not only so, but the motive or reason for the divine action in the gift of Christ is brought out in a rich variety of expression as being 'the praise of the glory of His grace' (1-6), or 'that He might gather together in one all things in Christ' (1-10), or that 'we should be to the praise of His glory' (1-12), or that 'unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.'

In like manner our text follows a sublime statement of what has been bestowed upon men in Jesus, with an equally sublime insight into the divine purpose of thereby showing 'the exceeding riches of His grace.' Such heights are not for our unaided traversing; it is neither reverent nor safe to speculate, and still less to dogmatise, concerning the meaning of the divine acts, but here, at all events, we have, as I believe, not a man making unwarranted assertions about God's purposes, but God Himself by a man, letting us see so far into the depths of Deity as to know the very deepest meaning of His very greatest acts, and when God speaks, it is neither reverent nor safe to refuse to listen.

I. The purpose of God in Christ is the display of His grace.

Of course we cannot speak of motives in the divine mind as in ours; they imply a previous state of indecision and an act of choice, from which comes the slow emerging of a resolve like that of the moon from the sea. A given end being considered by us desirable, we then cast about for means to secure it, which again implies limitation of power. Still we can speak of God's motives, if only we understand, as this epistle puts it so profoundly, that His 'is an eternal purpose which He purposed in Himself,' which never began to be formed, and was not formed by reason of anything external.

With that caution Paul would have us think that God's chiefest purpose in all the wondrous facts which make up the Gospel is the setting forth of Himself, and that the chiefest part of Himself, which He desires that all men should come to know, is the glory of His grace. Of course very many and various reasons for these acts may be alleged, but this is the deepest of them all. It has often been misunderstood and made into a very hard and horrible doctrine, which really means little else than all-mighty selfishness, but it is really a most blessed one; it is the proclamation in tenderest, most heart-melting fashion of the truth that God is Love, and therefore delights in imparting that which is His creatures' life and blessedness; it bids us think that He, too, amidst the blessedness of His infinite Being, knows the joy of communicating which makes so large a part of the blessedness of our finite selves, and that He, too, is capable of being touched and gladdened by the joy of expression. As an artist in his noblest work paints or chisels simply for love of pouring out his soul, so, but in infinitely loftier fashion, the great Artist delights to manifest Himself, and in manifesting to communicate somewhat of Himself. Creation is divine self-revelation, and we might say, with all reverence, that God acts as birds sing, and fountains leap, and stars shine.

But our text leads us still farther into mysteries of glory, when it defines what it is in God that he most desires to set forth. It is the 'exceeding riches of Grace,' in which wonderful expression we note the Apostle's passionate accumulation of epithets which he yet feels to be altogether inadequate to his theme. It would carry us too far to attempt to bring out the whole wealth contained in these words which glide so easily over unthinking lips, but we may lovingly dwell for a few moments upon them. Grace, in Paul's language, means love lavished upon the undeserving and sinful, a love which is not drawn forth by the perception of any excellence in its objects, but wells up and out like a fountain, by reason of the impulse in its subject, and which in itself contains and bestows all good and blessing. There may be, as this very letter shows, other aspects of the divine nature which God is glad that man should know. His power and His wisdom have their noblest illustration in the work of Jesus, and are less conspicuously manifested in all His work; but His grace is shrined in Christ alone, and from Him flows forth into a thirsty world. That love, 'unmerited and free,' holds in solution power, wisdom and all the other physical or metaphysical perfections belonging to God with all their energies. It is the elixir in which they are all contained, the molten splendour into which have been dissolved gold and jewels and all precious things. When we look at Christ, we see the divinest thing in God, and that is His grace. The Christ who shows us and certifies to us the grace of God must surely be more than man. Men look at Him and see it; He shows us that grace because He was full of grace and truth.

But Paul is here not propounding theological dogmas, but pouring out a heart full of personal experience, and so adds yet other words to express what he himself has found in the Divine Grace, and speaks of its riches. He has learned fully to trust its fulness, and in his own daily life has had the witness of its inexhaustible abundance, which remains the same after all its gifts. It 'operates unspent.' That continually self-communicating love pours out in no narrower stream to its last recipient than to its first. All 'eat and are filled,' and after they are satisfied twelve baskets full of fragments are taken up. These riches are exceeding; they surpass all human conception, all parallel, all human needs; they are properly transcendent.

This, then, is what God would have us know of Himself. So His love is at once the motive of His great message to us in Jesus Christ, and is the whole contents of the message, like some fountain, the force of whose pellucid waters cleanses the earth, and rushes into the sunshine, being at once the reason for the flow and that which flows. God reveals because He loves, and His love is that which He reveals.

II. The great manifestation of grace is God's kindness to us in Christ.

All the revelation of God in Creation and Providence carries the same message, but it is often there hard to decipher, like some half-obliterated inscription in a strange tongue. In Jesus the writing is legible, continuous, and needs no elaborate commentary to make its meaning intelligible. But we may note that what the Apostle founds on here is not so much Christ in Himself, as that which men receive in Christ. As he puts it in another part of this epistle, it is 'through the Church' that 'principalities and powers in heavenly places' are made to 'know the manifold wisdom of God.' It is 'His kindness towards us' by which 'to the ages to come,' is made known the exceeding riches of grace, and that kindness can be best estimated by thinking what we were, namely, dead in trespasses and sins; what we are, namely, quickened together in Christ; raised up with Him, and with Him made to sit in heavenly places, as the immediately preceding clauses express it. All this marvellous transformation of conditions and of self is realised 'in Christ Jesus.'

These three words recur over and over again in this profound epistle, and may be taken as its very keynote. It would carry us beyond all limits to deal with the various uses and profound meanings of this phrase in this letter, but we may at least point out how intimately and inseparably it is intertwined with the other aspect of our relations to Christ in which He is mainly regarded as dying for us, and may press upon you that these two are not, as they have sometimes been taken to be, antagonistic but complementary. We shall never understand the depths of the one Apostolic conception unless we bring it into closest connection with the other. Christ is for us only if we are in Christ; we are in Christ only because He died for us.

God's kindness is all 'in Christ Jesus'; in Him is the great channel through which His love comes to men, the river of God which is full of water. And that kindness is realised by us when we are 'in Christ.' Separated from Him we do not possess it; joined to Him as we may be by true faith in Him, it is ours, and with it all the blessings which it brings into our else empty and thirsting hearts. Now all this sets in strong light the dignity and work of Christian men; the profundity and clearness of their religious character is the great sign to the world of the love of God. The message of Christ to man lacks one chief evidence of its worth if they who profess to have received it do not, in their lives, show its value. The characters of Christian people are in every age the clearest and most effectual witnesses of the power of the Gospel. God's honour is in their hands. The starry heavens are best seen by reflecting telescopes, which, in their field, mirror the brightness above.

III. The manifestation of God through men 'in Christ' is for all ages.

In our text the ages to come open up into a vista of undefined duration, and, just as in another place in this epistle, Paul regards the Church as witnessing to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, so here he regards it as the perennial evidence to all generations of the ever-flowing riches of God's grace. Whatever may have been the Apostle's earlier expectations of the speedy coming of the day of the Lord, here he obviously expects the world to last through a long stretch of undefined time, and for all its changing epochs to have an unchanging light. That standing witness, borne by men in Christ, of the grace which has been so kind to them, is not to be antiquated nor superseded, but is as valid to-day as when these words gushed from the heart of Paul. Eyes which cannot look upon the sun can see it as a golden glory, tinging the clouds which lie cradled around it. And as long as the world lasts, so long will Christian men be God's witnesses to it.

There are then two questions of infinite importance to us—do we show in character and conduct the grace which we have received by reverently submitting ourselves to its transforming energy? We need to be very close to Him for ourselves if we would worthily witness to others of what we have found Him to be. We have but too sadly marred our witness, and have been like dim reflectors round a lamp which have received but little light from it, and have communicated even less than we have received. Do we see the grace that shines so brightly in Jesus Christ? God longs that we should so see; He calls us by all endearments and by loving threats to look to that Incarnation of Himself. And when we lift our eyes to behold, what is it that meets our gaze? Intolerable light? The blaze of the white throne? Power that crushes our puny might? No! the 'exceeding riches of grace.' The voice cries, 'Behold your God!' and what we see is, 'In the midst of the throne a lamb as it had been slain.'

SALVATION: GRACE: FAITH

'By grace have ye been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.'—EPH. ii. 8 (R.V.).

HERE are three of the key-words of the New Testament—'grace,' 'saved,' 'faith.' Once these terms were strange and new; now they are old and threadbare. Once they were like lava, glowing and cast up from the central depths; but it is a long while since the eruption, and the blocks have got cold, and the corners have been rubbed off them. I am afraid that some people, when they read such a text, will shrug the shoulder of weariness, and think that they are in for a dreary sermon.

But the more familiar a word is, the more likely are common ideas about it to be hazy. We substitute acquaintance with the sound for penetration into the sense. A frond of sea-weed, as long as it is in the ocean, unfolds its delicate films and glows with its subdued colours. Take it out, and it is hard and brown and ugly, and you have to plunge it into the water again before you see its beauty. So with these well-worn Christian terms; you have to put them back, by meditation and thought, especially as to their bearing on yourself, in order to understand their significance and to feel their power. And, although it is very hard, I want to try and do that for a few moments with this grand thought that lies in my text.

I. Here we have the Christian view of man's deepest need, and God's greatest gift.

'Ye have been saved.' Now, as I have said, 'saved,' and 'salvation,' and 'Saviour,' are all threadbare words. Let us try to grasp the whole throbbing meaning that is in them. Well, to begin with, and in its original and lowest application, this whole set of expressions is applied to physical danger from which it delivers, and physical disease which it heals. So, in the Gospels, for instance, you find 'Thy faith hath made thee whole'—literally, '*saved thee*.' And you hear one of the Apostles crying, in an excess of terror and collapse of faith, 'Save! Master! we perish!' The two notions that are conveyed in our familiar expression 'safe and sound,' both lie in the word—deliverance from danger, and healing of disease.

Then, when you lift it up into the loftier region, into which Christianity buoyed it up, the same double meaning attaches to it. The Christian salvation is, on its negative side, a deliverance from something impending—peril—and a healing of something infecting us—the sickness of sin.

It is a deliverance; what from? Take, in the briefest possible language, three sayings of Scripture to answer that question—what am I to be saved *from*? 'His name shall be called Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.' He 'delivers'—or saves—'us from the wrath to come.' He 'saves a soul from death.' Sin, wrath death, death spiritual as well as physical, these are the dangers which lie in wait; and the enemies which have laid their grip upon us. And from these, as the shepherd drags the kid from the claws of the lion or the bear's hug, the salvation of the Gospel wrenches and rescues men.

The same general conceptions emerge, if we notice, on the other side—what are the things which the New Testament sets forth as the opposites of its salvation? Take, again, a brief reference to Scripture words: 'The Son of Man came *not to condemn* the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.' So the antithesis is between judgment or condemnation on the one hand, and salvation on the other. That suggests thoughts substantially identical with the preceding but still more solemn, as bringing in the prospect a tribunal and a judge. The Gospel then reveals the Mighty Power that lifts itself between us and judgment, the Mighty Power that intervenes to prevent absolute destruction, the Power which saves from sin, from wrath, from death.

Along with them we may take the other thought, that salvation, as the New Testament understands it, is not only the rescue and deliverance of a man from evils conceived to lie round about him, and to threaten his being from without, but that it is his healing from evils which have so wrought themselves into his very being, and infected his whole nature, as that the emblem for them is a sickness unto death for the healing from which this mighty Physician comes. These are the negative sides of this great Christian thought.

But the New Testament salvation is more than a shelter, more than an escape. It not only trammels up evil possibilities, and prevents them from falling upon men's heads, but it introduces all good. It not only strips off the poisoned robe, but it invests with a royal garb. It is not only negatively the withdrawal from the power, and the setting above the reach, of all evil, in the widest sense of that word, physical and moral, but it is the endowment with every good, in the widest sense of that word, physical and moral, which man is capable of receiving, or God has wealth to bestow. And this positive significance of the Christian salvation, which includes not only pardon, and favour, and purity, and blessedness here in germ, and sure and certain hope of an overwhelming glory hereafter—this is all suggested to us by the fact that in Scripture, more than once, to 'have everlasting life,' and to 'enter into the Kingdom of God,' are employed as equivalent and alternative expressions for being saved with the salvation of God.

And that leads me to another point—my text, as those of you who have used the Revised Version will observe, is there slightly modified in translation, and reads 'Ye *have been* saved,'—a past act, done once, and with abiding present consequences, which are realised progressively in the Christian life, and reach forward into infinitude. So the Scripture sometimes speaks of salvation as past, 'He saved us by His mercy': sometimes of it as present and progressive, 'The Lord added to the Church daily those that were (in process of) being saved': sometimes of it as future, 'now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.' In that future all that is involved in the word will be evolved from it in blessed experience onwards through eternity.

I have said that we should try to make an effort to fathom the depth of meaning in this and other familiar commonplace terms of Scripture. But no effort prior to experience will ever fathom it. There was in the papers some time ago an account of some extraordinary deep-sea soundings that have been made away down in the South Pacific, 29,400 feet and no bottom, and the wire broke. The highest peak of the Himalayas might be put into that abyss, and there would be hundreds of feet between it and the surface. He 'casts all our sins,' mountainous as they are, behind His back 'into the depths of the sea'; and no plummet that man can drop will ever reach its profound abyss. 'Thy judgments are a great deep,' and deeper than the judgments is the depth of Thy salvation.

And now, brethren, before I go further, notice the—I was going to say theory, but that is a cold word—the facts of man's condition and need that underlie this great Christian term of salvation—viz. we are all in deadly peril; we are all sick of a fatal disease. 'Ah!' you say, 'that is Paul.' Yes! it is Paul. But it is not Paul only; it is Paul's Master, and, I hope, your Master; for He not only spoke loving, gentle words ot and about men, and not only was grace poured into His lips, but there is another side to His utterances. No one ever spoke sadder, sterner words about the real condition of men than Jesus Christ did. Lost sheep, lost coins, prodigal sons, builders of houses on the sand that are destined to be blown down and flooded away, men in danger of an undying worm and unquenchable fire—these are parts of Christ's representations of the condition of humanity, and these are the conceptions that underlie this great thought of salvation as being man's deepest need.

It goes far deeper down than any of the superficial constructions of what humanity requires, which are found among non-Christian, social and economical, and intellectual and political reformers. It includes all that is true in the estimate of any of these people, and it supplies all that they aim at. But it goes far beyond them. And as they stand pottering round the patient, and administering—what shall I say? 'pills for the earthquake,' as we once heard—it comes and brushes them aside and says, 'Physicians of no value! here is *the* thing that is wanted—salvation that comes from God.'

Brother! it is what you need. Do not be led away by the notion that wealth, or culture, or anything less than Christ's gift to men will meet your necessities. If once we catch a glimpse of what we really are, there will be no words wanted to enforce the priceless value of the salvation that the Gospel offers. It is sure to be an uninteresting word and thing to a man who does not feel himself to be a sinner. It is sure to be of perennial worth to a man who does. Life-belts lie unnoticed on the cabin-shelf above the berth as long as the sun is bright, and the sea calm, and everything goes well; but when the ship gets on the rocks the passengers fight to get them. If you know yourself, you will know that salvation is what you need.

II. Here we have the Christian unfolding of the source of salvation.

'By grace ye have been saved.' There is another threadbare word. It is employed in the New Testament with a very considerable width of signification, which we do not need to attend to here. But, in regard of the present context, let me just point out that the main idea conveyed by the word is that of favour, or lovingkindness, or goodwill, especially when directed to inferiors, and most eminently when given to those who do not deserve it, but deserve its opposite. 'Grace' is love that stoops and that requites, not according to desert, but bestows upon those who deserve nothing of the kind; so when the Apostle declares that the source of salvation is 'grace,' he declares two things. One is that the fountain of all our deliverance from sin, and of our healing of our sicknesses, lies in the deep heart of God, from which it wells up undrawn, unmotived, uncaused by anything except His own infinite loving-kindness. People have often presented the New Testament teaching about salvation as if it implied that God's love was brought to man because Jesus Christ died, and turned the divine affections. That is not New Testament teaching. Christ's death is not the cause of God's love, but God's love is the cause of Christ's death. 'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.'

When we hear in the Old Testament, 'I am that I am,' we may apply it to this great subject. For that declaration of the very inmost essence of the divine nature is not merely the declaration, in half metaphysical terms, of a self-substituting, self-determining Being, high above limitation and time and change, but it is a declaration that when He loves He loves freely and unmodified save by the constraint of His own Being. Just as the light, because it is light and must radiate, falls upon dunghills and diamonds, upon black rocks and white snow, upon ice-peaks and fertile fields, so the great fountain of the Divine Grace pours out upon men by reason only of its own continual tendency to communicate its own fulness and blessedness.

There follows from that the other thought, on which the Apostle mainly dwells in our context, that the salvation which we need, and may have, is not won by desert, but is given as a gift. Mark the last words of my text—'that not of yourselves it is the gift of God.' They have often been misunderstood, as if they referred to the faith which is mentioned just before. But that is a plain misconception of the Apostle's meaning, and is contradicted by the whole context. It is not faith that is the gift of God, but it is salvation by grace. That is plain if you will read on to the next verse. 'By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works lest any man should boast.' What is it that is 'not of works'? Faith? certainly not. Nobody would ever have thought it worth while to say, 'faith is *not* of works,' because nobody would have said that it *was*. The two clauses necessarily refer to the same thing, and if the latter of them must refer to salvation by grace, so must the former. Thus, the Apostle's meaning is that we get salvation, not because we work for it but because God gives it as a free gift, for which we have nothing to render, and which we can never deserve.

Now, I am sure that there are some of you who are saying to yourselves, 'This is that old, threadbare, commonplace preaching again!' Well! shame on us preachers if we have made a living Gospel into a dead theology. And shame no less on you hearers if by you the words that should be good news that would make the tongue of the dumb sing, and the lame man leap as a hart, have been petrified and fossilised into a mere dogma.

I know far better than you do how absolutely inadequate all my words are, but I want to bring it to you and to lay it not on your heads only but on your hearts, as the good news that we all need, that we have not to buy, that we have not to work to get salvation.

but that having got it we have to work thereafter. 'What shall we do that we might work the works of God?' A whole series of diverse, long, protracted, painful toils? Christ swept away the question by striking out the 's' at the end of the word, and answered, 'This is the *work*' (not 'works') 'of God,' the one thing which will open out into all heroism and practical obedience, 'that ye believe on Him to whom He hath sent.'

III. That leads me to the last point—viz. the Christian requirement of the condition of salvation.

Note the precision of the Apostle's prepositions: 'Ye have been saved *by* grace'; there is the source—'Ye have been saved by grace, *through* faith'—there is the medium, the instrument, or, if I may so say, the channel; or, to put it into other words, the condition by which the salvation which has its source in the deep heart of God pours its waters into my empty heart. 'Through faith,' another threadbare word, which, withal, has been dreadfully darkened by many comments, and has unfortunately been so represented as that people fancy it is some kind of special attitude of mind and heart, which is only brought to bear in reference to Christ's Gospel. It is a thousand pities, one sometimes thinks, that the word was not translated 'trust' instead of 'faith,' and then we should have understood that it was not a theological virtue at all, but just the common thing that we all know so well, which is the cement of human society and the blessedness of human affection, and which only needs to be lifted, as a plant that had been running along the ground, and had its tendrils bruised and its fruit marred might be lifted, and twined round the pillar of God's throne, in order to grow up and bear fruit that shall be found after many days unto praise, and honour, and glory.

Trust; that is the condition. The salvation rises from the heart of God. You cannot touch the stream at its source, but you can tap it away down in its flow. What do you want machinery and pumps for? Put a yard of wooden pipe into the river, and your house will have all the water it needs.

So, dear brethren, here is the condition—it is a condition only, for there is no virtue in the act of trust, but only in that with which we are brought into living union when we do trust. When salvation comes into my heart by faith it is not my faith but God's grace that puts salvation there.

Faith is only the condition, ay! but it is the indispensable condition. How many ways are there of getting possession of a gift? One only, I should suppose, and that is, to put out a hand and take it. If salvation is *by* grace it must be '*through* faith.' If you will not accept you cannot have. That is the plain meaning of what theologians call justification by faith; that pardon is given on condition of taking it. If you do not take it you cannot have it. And so this is the upshot of the whole—trust, and you have.

Oh, dear friends! open your eyes to see your dangers. Let your conscience tell you of your sickness. Do not try to deliver, or to heal yourselves. Self-reliance and self-help are very good things, but they leave their limitations, and they have no place here. 'Every man his own Redeemer' will not work. You can no more extricate yourself from the toils of sin than a man can release himself from the folds of a python. You can no more climb to heaven by your own effort than you can build a railway to the moon. You must sue *in forma pauperis*, and be content to accept as a boon an unmerited place in your Father's heart, an undeserved seat at His bountiful table, an unearned share in His wealth, from the hands of your Elder Brother, in whom is all His grace, and who gives salvation to every sinner if he will trust Him. 'By grace have ye been saved through faith.'

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP AND OUR WORKS

'We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.'—EPH. ii. 10.

THE metal is molten as it runs out of the blast furnace, but it soon cools and hardens. Paul's teaching about salvation by grace and by faith came in a hot stream from his heart, but to this generation his words are apt to sound coldly, and hardly theological. But they only need to be reflected upon in connection with our own experience, to become vivid and vital again. The belief that a man may work towards salvation is a universal heresy. And the Apostle, in the context, summons all his force to destroy that error, and to substitute the great truth that we have to begin with an act of God's, and only after that can think about our acts. To work up towards salvation is, in the strict sense of the words, *preposterous;* it is inverting the order of things. It is beginning at the wrong end. It is saying X Y Z before you have learnt to say A B C. We are to work downwards from salvation because we have it, not that we may get it. And whatever 'good works' may mean, they are the consequences, not the causes, of 'salvation,' whatever that may mean. But they are consequences, and they are the very purpose of it. So says Paul in the archaic language of my text—which only wants a little steadfast looking at to be turned into up-to-date gospel—'We are His workmanship, created unto good works'; and the fact that we are is one great reason for the assertion which he brings it in to buttress, that we are saved by grace, not by works. Now, I wish, in the simplest possible way, to deal with these great words, and take them as they lie before us.

I. We have, first, then, this as the root of everything, the divine creation.

Now, you will find that in this profound letter of the Apostle there are two ideas cropping up over and over again, both of them representing the facts of the Christian life and of the transition from the unchristian to the Christian; and the one is Resurrection and the other is Creation. They have this in common, that they suggest the idea that the great gift which Christianity brings to men—no, do not let me use the abstract word 'Christianity'—the great gift which *Christ* brings to men—is a new life. The low popular notion that salvation means mainly and primarily immunity from the ultimate, most lasting future consequences of transgression, a change of place or of condition, infects us all, and is far too dominant in our popular notions of Christianity and of salvation. And it is because people have such an unworthy, narrow, selfish idea of what 'salvation' is that they fall into the bog of misconception as to how it is to be attained. The ordinary man's way of looking at the whole matter is summed up in a sentence which I heard not long since about a recently deceased friend of the speaker's, and the like of which you have no doubt often heard and perhaps said, 'He is sure to be saved because he has lived so straight.' And at the foundation of that confident epitaph lay a tragical, profound misapprehension of what salvation was.

For it is something done in you; it is *not* something that you get, but it is something that you become. The teaching of this letter, and of the whole New Testament, is that the profoundest and most precious of all the gifts which come to us in Jesus Christ, and which in their totality are summed up in the one word that has so little power over us, because we understand it so little, and know it so well—'salvation'—is a change in a man's nature so deep, radical, vital, as that it may fairly be paralleled with a resurrection from the dead.

Now, I venture to believe that it is something more than a strong rhetorical figure when that change is described as being the creation of a new man within us. The resurrection symbol for the same fact may be treated as but a symbol. You cannot treat the teaching of a new life in Christ as being a mere figure. It is something a great deal more than that, and when once a man's eye is opened to look for it in the New Testament it is wonderful how it flashes out from every page and underlies the whole teaching. The Gospel of John, for example, is but one long symphony which has for its dominant theme 'I am come that they might have life.' And that great teaching—which has been so vulgarised, narrowed, and mishandled by sacerdotal pretensions and sacramentarian superstitions—that great teaching of Regeneration, or the new birth, rests upon this as its very basis, that what takes place when a man turns to Jesus Christ, and is saved by Him, is that there is communicated to him not in symbol but in spiritual fact (and spiritual facts are far more true than external ones which are called real) a spark of Christ's own life, something of 'that spirit of life which was in Christ Jesus,' and by which, and by which alone, being transfused into us, we become 'free from the law of sin and death.' I beseech you, brethren, see that, in your perspective of Christian truth, the thought of a new life imparted to us has as prominent and as dominant a place as it obviously has in the teaching of the New Testament. It is not so dominant in the current notions of Christianity that prevail amongst average people, but it is so in all men who let themselves be guided by the plain teaching of Christ Himself and of all His servants. Salvation? Yes! And the very essence of the salvation is the breathing into me of a divine life, so that I become partaker of 'the divine nature.'

Now, there is another step to be taken, and that is that this new life is realised in Christ Jesus. Now, this letter of the Apostle is distinguished even amongst his letters by the extraordinary frequency and emphasis with which he uses that expression 'in Christ Jesus.' If you will take up the epistle, and run your eye over it at your leisure, I think you will be surprised to find how, in all connections, and linked with every sort of blessing and good as its condition, there recurs that phrase. It is 'in Christ' that we obtain the inheritance; it is 'in Christ' that we receive 'redemption, even the forgiveness of sins': it is in Him that we are 'builded together for a habitation of God'; it is in Him that all fulness of divine gifts, and all blessedness of spiritual capacities, is communicated to us; and unless, in our perspective of the Christian life, that expression has the same prominence as it has in this letter, we have yet to learn the sweetest sweetness, and have yet to receive the most mighty power, of the Gospel that we profess. 'In Christ'—a union which leaves the individuality of the Saviour and of the saint unimpaired, because without such individuality sweet love were slain, and there were no communion possible, but which is so close, so real, so vital, as that only the separating wall of personality and individual consciousness comes in between—that is the New Testament teaching of the relation of the Christian to Christ. Is it your experience, dear brother? Do not be frightened by talking about mysticism. If a Christianity has no mysticism it has no life. There is a wholesome mysticism and there is a morbid one, and the wholesome one is the very nerve of the Gospel as it is presented by Jesus Himself: 'I am the Vine, ye are the branches. Abide in Me, and I in you.' If our nineteenth century busy Christianity could only get hold of that truth as firmly as it grasps the representative and sacrificial character of Christ's work, I believe it would come like a breath of spring over 'the winter of our discontent,' and would change profoundly and blessedly the whole contexture of modern Christianity.

And now there is another step to take, and that is that this union with Christ, which results in the communication of a new life, or, as my text puts it, a new creation, depends upon our faith. We are not passive in the matter. There is the condition on which the entrance of the life into our spirits is made possible. You must open the door, you must fling wide the casement, and the blessed warm morning air of the sun of righteousness, with healing in its beams, will rush in, scatter the darkness and raise the temperature. 'Faith,' by which we simply mean the act of the mind in accepting and of the will and heart in casting one's self upon Christ as the Saviour—that act is the condition of this new life. And so each Christian is 'God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus.'

And now, says Paul—and here some of us will hesitate to follow him—that new creation has to go before what you call 'good works.' Now, do not let us exaggerate. There has seldom been a more disastrous and untrue thing said than what one of the Fathers dared to say, that the virtues of godless men were 'splendid vices.' That is not so, and that is not the New Testament teaching. Good is good, whoever does it. But, then, no man will say that actions, however they may meet the human conception of excellence, however bright, pure, lofty in motive and in aim they may be, reach their highest possible radiance and are as good as they ought to be, if they are done without any reference to God and His love. Dear brethren, we surely do not need to have the alphabet of morality repeated to us, that the worth of an action depends upon its motive, that no motive is correspondent to our capacities and our relation to God and our consequent responsibilities, except the motive of loving obedience to Him. Unless that be present, the brightest of human acts must be convicted of having dark shadows in it, and all the darker because of the brightness that may stream from it. And so I venture to assert that since the noblest systems of morality, apart from religion, will all coincide in saying that to be is more than to do. and that the worth of an action depends upon its motive, we are brought straight up to the 'narrow, bigoted' teaching of the New Testament, that unless a man is swayed by the love of God in what he does, you cannot, in the most searching analysis, say that his deed is as good as it ought to be, and as it might be. To be good is the first thing, to do good is the second. Make the tree good and its fruit good. And since, as we have made ourselves we are evil, there must come a re-creation before we can do the good deeds which our relation to God requires at our hands.

II. I ask you to look at the purpose of this new creation brought out in our text.

'Created in Christ Jesus unto good works.' That is what life is given to you for. That is why you are saved, says Paul. Instead of working upwards from works to salvation, take your stand at the received salvation, and understand what it is for, and work downwards from it.

Now, do not let us take that phrase, 'good works,' which I have already said came hot from the Apostle's heart, and is now cold as a bar of iron, in the limited sense which it has come to bear in modern religious phraseology. It means something a great deal more than that. It covers the whole ground of what the Apostle, in another of his letters, speaks of when he says, 'Whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, if there be any virtue'—to use for a moment the world's word, which has such power to conjure in Greek ethics—'or if there be any praise'—to use for a moment the world's low motive, which has such power to sway men—'think of these things,' and these things do. That is the width of the conception of 'good works'; everything that is 'lovely and of good report.' That is what you receive the new life for.

Contrast that with other notions of the purpose of revelation and redemption. Contrast it with what I have already referred to, and so need not enlarge upon now, the miserably inadequate and low notions of the essentials of salvation which one hears perpetually, and which many of us cherish. It is no mere immunity from a future hell. It is no mere entrance into a vague heaven. It is not escaping the penalty of the inexorable law, 'Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,' that is meant by 'salvation,' any more than it is putting away the rod, which the child would be all the better for having administered to him, that is meant by 'forgiveness.' But just as forgiveness, in its essence, means not suspension nor abolition of penalty, but the uninterrupted flow of the Father's love, so salvation in its essence means, not the deliverance from any external evil or the alteration of anything in the external position, but the revolution and the re-creation of the man's nature. And the purpose of it is that the saved man may live in conformity with the will of God, and that on his character there may be embroidered all the fair things which God desires to see on His child's vesture.

Contrast it with the notion that an orthodox belief is the purpose of revelation. I remember hearing once of a man that 'he was a very shady character, but sound on the Atonement.' What is the use of being 'sound on the Atonement' if the Atonement does not make you live the Christ life? And what is the good of all your orthodoxy unless the orthodoxy of creed issues in orthopraxy of conduct? There are far too many of us who half-consciously do still hold by the notion that if a man believes rightly then that makes him a Christian. My text shatters to pieces any such conception. You are saved that you may be good, and do good continually; and unless you are so doing you may be steeped to the eyebrows in the correctest of creeds, and it will only drown you.

Contrast this conception of the purpose of Christianity with the far too common notion that we are saved, mainly in order that we may indulge in devout emotions, and in the outgoing of affection and confidence to Jesus Christ. Emotional Christianity is necessary, but Christianity, which is mainly or exclusively emotional, lives next door to hypocrisy, and there is a door of communication between them. For there is nothing more certain and more often illustrated in experience than that there is a strange underground connection between a Christianity which is mainly fervid and a very shady life. One sees it over and over again. And the cure of that is to apprehend the great truth of my text, that we are saved, not in order that we may know aright, nor in order that we may feel aright, but in order that we may be good and do 'good works.' In the order of things, right thought touches the springs of right feeling, and right feeling sets going the wheels of right action. Do not let the steam all go roaring out of the waste-pipe in however sacred and blessed emotions. See that it is guided so as to drive the spindles and the shuttles and make the web.

III. And now, lastly, and only a word—here we have the field provided for the exercise of the 'good works.'

'Created unto good works which God has before prepared'—before the re-creation—'that we should walk in them.' That is to say, the true way to look at the life is to regard it as the exercising-ground which God has prepared for the development of the life that, through Christ, is implanted in us. He cuts the channels that the stream may flow. That is the way to look at tasks, at difficulties. Difficulty is the parent of power, and God arranges our circumstances in order that, by wrestling with obstacles, we may gain the 'thews that throw the world,' and in order that in sorrows and in joys, in the rough places and the smooth, we may find occasions for the exercise of the goodness which is lodged potentially in us, when He creates us in Christ Jesus. So be sure that the path and the power will always correspond. God does not lead us on roads that are too steep for our weakness, and too long for our strength. What He bids us do He fits us for; what He fits us for He thereby bids us do.

And so, dear brother, take heed that you are fulfilling the purpose for which you receive this new life. And let us all remember the order in which being and doing come. We must *be* good first, and then, and only then, shall we *do* good. We must have Christ for us first, our sacrifice and our means of receiving that new life, and then, Christ in us, the soul of our souls, the Life of our lives, the source of all our goodness.

'If any power we have, it is to ill,
And all the power is Thine to do and eke to will.'

'THE CHIEF CORNER-STONE'

'Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner-stone.'—EPH. ii. 20 (R.V.).

THE Roman Empire had in Paul's time gathered into a great unity the Asiatics of Ephesus, the Greeks of Corinth, the Jews of Palestine, and men of many another race, but grand and imposing as that great unity was, it was to Paul a poor thing compared with the oneness of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. Asiatics of Ephesus, Greeks of Corinth, Jews of Palestine and members of many another race could say, 'Our citizenship is in heaven.' The Roman Eagle swept over wide regions in her flight, but the Dove of Peace, sent forth from Christ's hand, travelled further than she. As Paul says in the context, the Ephesians had been strangers, 'aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,' wandering like the remnants of some 'broken clans,' but now they are gathered in. That narrow community of the Jewish nation has expanded its bounds and become the mother-country of believing souls, the true 'island of saints.' It was not Rome which really made all peoples one, but it was the weakest and most despised of her subject races. 'Of Zion it shall be said,' 'Lo! this and that man was born in her.'

To emphasise the thought of the great unity of the Church, the Apostle uses here his often-repeated metaphor of a temple, of which the Ephesian Christians are the stones, apostles and prophets the builders, and Christ Himself the chief corner-stone. Of course the representation of the foundation, as being laid by apostles and prophets, refers to them as proclaiming the Gospel. The real laying of the foundation is the work of the divine power and love which gave us Christ, and it is the Divine Voice which proclaims, 'Behold *I* lay in Zion a foundation!' But that divine work has to be made known among men, and it is by the making of it known that the building rises course by course. There is no contradiction between the two statements, 'I have laid the foundation' and Paul's 'As a wise master-builder I have laid the foundation.'

A question may here rise as to the meaning of 'prophets.' Unquestionably the expression in other places of the Epistle does mean New Testament prophets, but seeing that here Jesus is designated as the foundation stone which, standing beneath two walls, has a face into each, and binds them strongly together, it is more natural to see in the prophets the representatives of the great teachers of the old dispensation as the apostles were of the new. The remarkable order in which these two classes are named, the apostles being first, and the prophets who were first in time being last in order of mention, confirms this explanation, for the two co-operating classes are named in the order in which they lie in the foundation. Digging down you come to the more recent first, to the earlier second, and deep and massive, beneath all, to the corner-stone on whom all rests, in whom all are united together. Following the Apostle's order we may note the process of building; beneath that, the foundation on which the building rests; and beneath it, the corner-stone which underlies and unites the whole.

I. The process of building.

In the previous clauses the Apostle has represented the condition of the Ephesian Christians before their Christianity as being that of strangers and foreigners lacking the rights of citizenship anywhere, a mob rather than in any sense a society. They had been like a confused heap of stones flung fortuitously together; they had become fellow-citizens with the saints. The stones had been piled up into an orderly building. He is not ignoring the facts of national, political, or civic relationships which existed independent of the new unity realised in a common faith. These relationships could not be ignored by one who had had Paul's experience of their formidable character as antagonists of him and of his message, but they seemed to him, in contrast with the still deeper and far more perfect union, which was being brought about in Christ, of men of all nationalities and belonging to mutually hostile races, to be little better than the fortuitous union of a pile of stones huddled together on the roadside. Measured against the architecture of the Church, as Paul saw it in his lofty idealism, the aggregations of men in the world do not deserve the name of buildings. His point of view is the exact opposite of that which is common around us, and which, alas! finds but too much support in the present aspects of the so-called churches of this day.

It is to be observed that in our text these stones are, in accordance with the propriety of the metaphor, regarded as *being* built, that is, as in some sense the subjects of a force brought to bear upon them, which results in their being laid together in orderly fashion and according to a plan, but it is not to be forgotten that, according to the teaching, not of this epistle alone, but of all Paul's letters, the living stones are active in the work of building, as well as beings subject to an influence. In another place of the New Testament we read the exhortation to 'build up yourselves on your most holy faith,' and the means of discharging that duty are set forth in the words which follow it; as being 'Praying in the Holy Spirit, keeping yourselves in the love of God, and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Throughout the Pauline letters we have frequent references to *edifying*, a phrase which has been so vulgarised by much handling that its great meaning has been all but lost, but which still, rightly understood, presents the Christian life as one continuous effort after developing Christian character. Taking into view the whole of the apostolic references to this continuous process of building, we cannot but recognise that it all begins with the act of faith which brings men into immediate contact and vital union with Jesus Christ, and which is, if anything that a man does is, the act of his very inmost self passing out of its own isolation and resting itself on Jesus. It is by the vital and individual act of faith that any soul escapes from the dreary isolation of being a stranger and a foreigner, wandering, homeless and solitary, and finds through Jesus fellowship, an elder Brother, a Father, and a home populous with many brethren. But whilst faith is the condition of beginning the Christian life, which is the only real life, that life has to be continued and developed towards perfection by continuous effort. ''Tis a life-long toil till the lump be leavened.'

One of the passages already referred to varies the metaphor of building, in so far as it seems to represent 'your most holy faith' as the foundation, and may be an instance of the doubtful New Testament usage of 'faith,' as meaning the believed Gospel, rather than the personal act of believing. But however that may be, the context of the words clearly suggests the practical duties by which the Christian life is preserved and strengthened. They who build up themselves do so, mainly, by keeping themselves in the love of God with watchful oversight and continual preparedness for struggle against all foes who would drag them from that safe fortress, and subsidiarily, by like continuity in prayer, and in fixing their meek hope on the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. If Christian character is ever to be made more Christian, it must be by a firmer grasp and a more vivid realisation of Christ and His truth. The more we feel ourselves to be lapped in the love of God, the more shall we be builded up on our most holy faith. There is no mystery about the means of Christian progress. That which, at the beginning, made a man a Christian shapes his whole future course; the measure of our faith is the measure of our advance.

But the Apostle, in the immediately following words, goes on to pass beyond the bounds of his metaphor, and with complete indifference to the charge of mixing figures, speaks of the building as growing. That thought leads us into a higher region than that of effort. The process by which a great forest tree thickens its boles, expands the sweep of its branches and lifts them nearer the heavens, is very different from that by which a building rises slowly and toilsomely and with manifest incompleteness all the time, until the flag flies on the roof-tree. And if we had not this nobler thought of a possible advance by the increasing circulation within us of a mysterious life, there would be little gospel in a word which only enjoined effort as the condition of moral progress, and there would be little to choose between Paul and Plato. He goes on immediately to bring out more fully what he means by the growth of the building, when he says that if Christians are in Christ, they are 'built up for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' Union with Christ, and a consequent life in the Spirit, are sure to result in the growth of the individual soul and of the collective community. That divine Spirit dwells in and works through every believing soul, and while it is possible to grieve and to quench It, to resist and even to neutralise Its workings, these are the true sources of all our growth in grace and knowledge. The process of building may be and will be slow. Sometimes lurking enemies will pull down in a night what we have laboured at for many days. Often our hands will be slack and our hearts will droop. We shall often be tempted to think that our progress is so slow that it is doubtful if we have ever been on the foundation at all or have been building at all. But 'the Spirit helpeth our infirmities,' and the task is not ours alone but His in us. We have to recognise that effort is inseparable from building, but we have also to remember that growth depends on the free circulation of life, and that if we are, and abide in, Jesus, we cannot but be built 'for an habitation of God in the Spirit.' We may be sure that whatever may be the gaps and shortcomings in the structures that we rear here, none will be able to say of us at the last, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'

II. The foundation on which the building rests.

In the Greek, as in our version, there is no definite article before 'prophets,' and its absence indicates that both sets of persons here mentioned come under the common *vinculum* of the one definite article preceding the first named. So that apostles and prophets belong to one class. It may be a question whether the foundation is theirs in the sense that they constitute it, an explanation in favour of which can be quoted the vision in the Apocalypse of the new Jerusalem, in the twelve foundations of which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, or whether, as is more probable, the foundation is conceived of as laid by them. In like manner the Apostle speaks to the Corinthians of having 'as a wise master-builder laid the foundation,' and to the Romans of making it his aim to preach especially where Christ was not already named, that he might 'not build upon another man's foundation.' Following these indications, it seems best to understand the preaching of the Gospel as being the laying of the foundation.

Further, the question may be raised whether the prophets here mentioned belong to the Old Testament or to the New. The latter alternative has been preferred on the ground that the apostles are named first, but, as we have already noticed, the order here begins at the top and goes downwards, what was last in order of time being first in order of mention. We need only recall Peter's bold words that 'all the prophets, as many as have spoken, have told of the days' of Christ, or Paul's sermon in the synagogue of Antioch in which he passionately insisted on the Jewish crime of condemning Christ as being the fulfilment of the voices of the prophets, and of the Resurrection of Jesus as being God's fulfilment of the promise made unto the fathers to understand how here, as it were, beneath the foundation laid by the present preaching of the apostles, Paul rejoices to discern the ancient stones firmly laid by long dead hands.

The Apostle's strongest conviction was that he himself had become more and not less of a Jew by becoming a Christian, and that the Gospel which he preached was nothing more than the perfecting of that Gospel before the Gospel, which had come from the lips of the prophets. We know a great deal more than he did as to the ways in which the progressive divine revelation was presented to Israel through the ages, and some of us are tempted to think that we know more than we do, but the true bearing of modern criticism, as applied to the Old Testament, is to confirm, even whilst it may to some extent modify, the conviction common to all the New Testament writers, and formulated by the last of the New Testament prophets, that 'the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Whatever new light may shine on the questions of the origin and composition of the books of the Old Testament, it will never obscure the radiance of the majestic figure of the Messiah which shines from the prophetic page. The inner relation between the foundation of the apostles and that of the prophets is best set forth in the solemn colloquy on the Mount of Transfiguration between Moses and Elias and Jesus. They 'were with Him' as witnessing to Him to whom law and ritual and prophecy had pointed, and they 'spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem' as being the vital centre of all His work which the lambs slain according to ritual had foreshadowed, and the prophetic figure of the Servant of the Lord 'wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities' had more distinctly foretold.

III. The corner-stone which underlies and unites the whole.

Of course .the corner-stone here is the foundation-stone and not 'the head-stone of the corner.' Jesus

Christ is both. He is the first and the last; the Alpha and Omega. In accordance with the whole context, in which the prevailing idea is that which always fired Paul's imagination, viz. that of reconciling Jew and Gentile in one new man, it is best to suppose a reference here to the union of Jew and Gentile. The stone laid beneath the two walls which diverge at right angles from each other binds both together and gives strength and cohesion to the whole. In the previous context the same idea is set forth that Christ 'preached peace to them that were afar off (Gentiles) and to them that were nigh (Jews).' By His death He broke down another wall, the middle wall of partition between them, and did so by abolishing 'the law of commandments contained in ordinances.' The old distinction between Jew and Gentile, which was accentuated by the Jew's rigid observance of ordinances and which often led to bitter hatred on both sides, was swept away in that strange new thing, a community of believers drawn together in Jesus Christ. The former antagonistic 'twain' had become one in a third order of man, the Christian man. The Jew Christian and the Gentile Christian became brethren because they had received one new life, and they who had common feelings of faith and love to the same Saviour, a common character drawn from Him, and a common destiny open to them by their common relation to Jesus, could never cherish the old emotions of racial hate.

When we, in this day, try to picture to ourselves that strange new thing, the love which bound the early Christians together and buried as beneath a rushing flood the formidable walls of separation between them, we may well penitently ask ourselves how it comes that Jesus seems to have so much less power to triumph over the divisive forces that part us from those who should be our hearts' brothers. In our modern life there are no such gulfs of separation from one another as were filled up unconsciously in the experience of the first believers, but the narrower chinks seem to remain in their ugliness between those who profess a common faith in one Lord, and who are all ready to assert that they are built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, and that Jesus Christ is from them the chief corner-stone.

If in reality He is so to us, and He is so if we have been builded upon Him through our faith, the metaphor of corner-stone and building will fail to express the reality of our relation to Him, for our corner-stone has in it an infinite vitality which rises up through all the courses of the living stones, and moulds each 'into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.' So it shall be for each individual, though here the appropriation of the perfect gift is imperfect. So it shall be in reference to the history of the world. Christ is its centre and foundation-stone, and as His coming makes the date from which the nations reckon, and all before it was in the deepest sense preparatory to His incarnation, all which is after it is in the deepest sense the appropriating of Him and the developing of His work. The multitudes which went before and that followed cried, saying, 'Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.'

'THE WHOLE FAMILY'

'The whole family in heaven and earth.'—EPH. iii. 15.

GRAMMATICALLY, we are driven to recognise that the Revised Version is more correct than the Authorised, when it reads 'every family,' instead of 'the whole family.' There is in the expression no reference to the thought, however true it is in itself, that the redeemed in heaven and the believers on earth make up but one family. The thought rather is, that, as has been said, 'the father makes the family,' and if any community of intelligent beings, human, or angelic, bears the great name of family, the great reason for that lies 'in God's paternal relationship.'

But my present purpose in selecting this text is not so much to speak of *it* as to lay hold of the probably incorrect rendering in the Authorised Version, as suggesting, though here inaccurately, the thought that believers struggling here and saints and angels glorious above 'but one communion make,' and in the light of that thought, to consider the meaning of the Lord's Supper. I am, of course, fully conscious that in thus using the words, I am diverting them from their original purpose; but possibly in this case, open confession, *my* open confession, may merit your forgiveness and at all events, it, in some degree, brings me my own.

I. Consider the Lord's Supper as a sign that the Church on earth is a family.

The Passover was essentially a family feast, and the Lord's Supper, which was grafted on it, was plainly meant to be the same. The domestic character of the rite shines clearly out in the precious simplicity of the arrangements in the upper room. When Christ and the twelve sat down there, it was a family meal at which they sat. He was the head of the household; they were members of His family. The early examples of the rite, when the disciples 'gathered together to break bread,' obviously preserved the same familiar character, and stand in extraordinary contrast to the splendours of high mass in a Roman Catholic Cathedral. The Church, as a whole, is a household, and the very form of the rite proclaims that 'we, being many, are one bread.' The conception of a family brings clearly into view the deepest ground of Christian unity. It is the possession of a common life, just as men are born into an earthly family, not of their own will, nor of their own working, and come without any action of their own into bonds of blood relationship with brothers and sisters. When we become sons of God and are born again, we become brethren of all His children. That which gives us life in Him makes us kindred with all through whose veins flows that same life. It is the common partaking in the one bread which makes us one. The same blood flows in the veins of all the children.

Hence, the only ground on which the Church rests is this common possession of the life of Christ, and that ground makes, and ought to be felt to make, Christian union a far deeper, more blessed, and more imperative bond than can be found in any shallow similarities of aim—or identities of opinion or feeling. The deepest fact of Christian consciousness is the foundation fact of Christian brotherhood; each is nearer to every Christian than to any besides. A very solemn view of Christian duty arises from these thoughts, familiar as they are:

'No distance breaks the tie of blood,
Brothers are brothers ever more.'

and every tongue is loud in condemnation of any man who is ashamed or afraid to recognise his brother and stand by him, whatever may be the difference in their worldly positions. 'Every one who loveth Him that begat, loveth Him also that is begotten of Him.'

II. The Lord's Supper as a prophecy of the family at home above.

The prophetic character was stamped on the first institution of the Lord's Supper by Christ's own words 'until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God,' and by His declaration that He appointed unto them a kingdom, that they might eat and drink at His table in His kingdom. We may also recall the mysterious feast spread on the shore of the lake, where, with obvious allusion both to his earlier miracles and to the sad hour in the upper room, he came 'and taketh the bread and gave it to them.' Blending these two together we get most blessed, though dim, thoughts of that future; they speak to us of an eternal home, an eternal feast, and an eternal society. We have to reverse not a few of the characteristics of the upper room in order to reach those of the table in the kingdom. The Lord's Supper was followed for Him by Gethsemane and Calvary, and for them by going out to betray and to deny and to forsake Him. From that better table there is no more going out. The servant comes in from the field, spent with toil and stained with many a splash, but the Master Himself comes forth and serves His servant.

In the eternal feast, which is spread above, the bread as well as the wine is new, even whilst it is old, for there will be disclosed new depths of blessing and power in the old Christ, and new draughts of joy and strength in the old wine which will make the feasters ay, in rapture and astonishment, to the Master of the feast, 'Thou hast kept the good wine until now.' There and then all broken ties will be re-knit, all losses supplied, and no shadow of change, nor fear of exhaustion, pass across the calm hearts.

III. The Lord's Supper is a token of the present union of the two.

If it thus prophesies the perfectness of heaven, it also shows us how the two communities of earth and heaven are united. They, as we, live by derivation of the one life; they, as we, are fed and blessed by the one Lord. The occupations and thoughts of Christian life on earth and of the perfect life of Saints above are one. They look to Christ as we do, when we live as Christians, though the sun which is the light of both regions shows there a broader disc, and pours forth more fervid rays, and is never obscured by clouds, nor ever sets in night. Whether conscious of us or not, they are doing there, in perfect fashion, what we imperfectly attempt, and partially accomplish.

> 'The Saints on earth and all the Dead
> But one communion make.'

Heaven and earth are equally mansions in the Father's house.

To the faith which realises this great truth, death dwindles to a small matter. The Lord's table has an upper and a lower level. Sitting at the lower, we may feel that those who have gone from our sides, and have left empty places which never can be filled, are gathered round Him in the upper half, and though a screen hangs between the two, yet the feast is one and the family is one. Singly our dear ones go, and singly we all shall go. The table spread in the presence of enemies will be left vacant to its last place, and the one spread above will be filled to its last place, and so shall we ever be with the Lord, and the unity which was always real be perfectly and permanently manifested at the last.

STRENGTHENED WITH MIGHT

'That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man.'—EPH. iii. 16.

IN no part of Paul's letters does he rise to a higher level than in his prayers, and none of his prayers are fuller of fervour than this wonderful series of petitions. They open out one into the other like some majestic suite of apartments in a great palace-temple, each leading into a loftier and more spacious hall, each drawing nearer the presence-chamber, until at last we stand there.

Roughly speaking, the prayer is divided into four petitions, of which each is the cause of the following and the result of the preceding—'That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man'—that is the first. 'In order that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith,' 'ye being rooted and grounded in love'—such is the second, the result of the first, and the preparation for the third. 'That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints . . . and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,' such is the third, and all lead up at last to that wonderful desire beyond which nothing is possible—'that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.'

I venture to contemplate dealing with these four petitions in successive sermons, in order, God helping me, that I may bring before you a fairer vision of the possibilities of your Christian life than you ordinarily entertain. For Paul's prayer is God's purpose, and what He means with all who profess His name is that these exuberant desires may be fulfilled in them. So let us now listen to that petition which is the foundation of all, and consider that great thought of the divine strength-giving power which may be bestowed upon every Christian soul.

I. First, then, I remark that God means, and wishes, that all Christians should be strong by the possession of the Spirit of might.

It is a miserably inadequate conception of Christianity, and of the gifts which it bestows, and the blessings which it intends for men, when it is limited, as it practically is, by a large number—I might almost say the majority—of professing Christians to a simple means of altering their relation to the past, and to the broken law of God and of righteousness. Thanks be to His name! His great gift to the world begins in each individual case with the assurance that all the past is cancelled. He gives that blessed sense of forgiveness, which can never be too highly estimated unless it is forced out of its true place as the introduction, and made to be the climax and the end, of His gifts. I do not know what Christianity means, unless it means that you and I are forgiven for a purpose; that the purpose, if I may so say, is something in advance of the means towards the purpose, the purpose being that we should be filled with all the strength and righteousness and supernatural life granted to us by the Spirit of God.

It is well that we should enter into the vestibule. There is no other path to the throne but through the vestibule. But do not let us forget that the good news of forgiveness, though we need it day by day, and need it perpetually repeated, is but the introduction to and porch of the Temple, and that beyond it there towers, if I cannot say a loftier, yet I may say a further gift, even the gift of a divine life like His, from whom it comes, and of which it is in reality an effluence and a spark. The true characteristic blessing of the Gospel is the gift of a new power to a sinful weak world; a power which makes the feeble strong, and the strongest as an angel of God.

Oh, brethren! we who know how, 'if any power we have, it is to ill'; we who understand the weakness, the unaptness of our spirits to any good, and our strength for every vagrant evil that comes upon them to tempt them, should surely recognise as a Gospel in very deed that which proclaims to us that the 'everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth,' who Himself 'fainteth not, neither is weary,' hath yet a loftier display of His strength-giving power than that which is visible in the heavens above, where, 'because He is strong in might not one faileth.' That heaven, the region of calm completeness, of law unbroken and therefore of power undiminished, affords a lesser and dimmer manifestation of His strength than the work that is done in the hell of a human heart that has wandered and is brought back, that is stricken with the weakness of the fever of sin, and is healed into the strength of obedience and the omnipotence of dependence. It is much to say 'for that He is strong in might, not one of these faileth,' it is more to say 'He giveth power to them that have failed; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' The Gospel is the gift of pardon for holiness, and its inmost and most characteristic bestowment is the bestowment of a new power for obedience and service.

And that power, as I need not remind you, is given to us through the gift of the Divine Spirit. The very name of that Spirit is the 'Spirit of Might.' Christ spoke to us about being 'endued with power from on high.' The last of His promises that dropped from His lips upon earth was the promise that His followers should receive the power of the Spirit coming upon them. Wheresoever in the early histories we read of a man who was full of the Holy Ghost, we read that he was 'full of power.' According to the teaching of this Apostle, God hath given us the 'Spirit of power,' which is also the Spirit 'of love and of a sound mind.' So the strength that we must have, if we have strength at all, is the strength of a Divine Spirit, not our own, that dwells in us, and works through us.

And there is nothing in that which need startle or surprise any man who believes in a living God at all, and in the possibility, therefore, of a connection between the Great Spirit and all the human spirits which are His children. I would maintain, in opposition to many modern conceptions, the actual supernatural character of the gift that is bestowed upon every Christian soul. My reading of the New Testament is that as distinctly above the order of material nature as is any miracle, is the gift that flows into a believing heart. There is a direct passage between God and my spirit. It lies open to His touch; all the paths of its deep things can be trodden by Him. You and I act upon one another from without, He acts upon us within. We wish one another blessings; He gives the blessings. We try to train, to educate, to incline, and dispose, by the presentation of motives and the urging of reasons; He can plant in a heart by His own divine husbandry the seed that shall blossom into immortal life. And so the Christian Church is a great, continuous, supernatural community in the midst of the material world; and every believing soul, because it possesses something of the life of Jesus Christ, has been the seat of a miracle as real and true as when He said 'Lazarus, come forth!' Precisely this teaching does our Lord Himself present for our acceptance when He sets side by side, as mutually illustrative, as belonging to the same order of supernatural phenomena, 'the hour is coming when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live,' which is the supernatural resurrection of souls dead in sin,—and 'the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth,' which is the future resurrection of the body, in obedience to His will.

So, Christian men and women, do you set clearly before you this: that God's purpose with you is but begun when He has forgiven you, that He forgives you for a design, that it is a means to an end, and that you have not reached the conception of the large things which He intends for you unless you have risen to this great thought—He means and wishes that you should be strong with the strength of His own Divine Spirit.

II. Now notice, next, that this Divine Power has its seat in, and is intended to influence the whole of, the inner life.

As my text puts it, we may be 'strengthened with might by His Spirit *in the inner man.*' By the 'inner man' I suppose, is not meant the new creation through faith in Jesus Christ which this Apostle calls 'the new man,' but simply what Peter calls the 'hidden man of the heart,' the 'soul,' or unseen self as distinguished from the visible material body which it animates and informs. It is this inner self, then, in which the Spirit of God is to dwell, and into which it is to breathe strength. The leaven is hid deep in three measures of meal until the whole be leavened. And the point to mark is that the whole inward region which makes up the true man is the field upon which this Divine Spirit is to work. It is not a bit of your inward life that is to be hallowed. It is not any one aspect of it that is to be strengthened, but it is the whole intellect, affections, desires, tastes, powers of attention, conscience, imagination, memory, will. The whole inner man in all its corners is to be filled, and to come under the influence of this power, 'until there be no part dark, as when the bright shining of a candle giveth thee light.'

There is no part of my being that is not patent to the tread of this Divine Guest. There are no rooms of the house of my spirit into which He may not go. Let Him come with the master key in His hand into all the dim chambers of your feeble nature; and as the one life is light in the eye, and colour in the cheek, and deftness in the fingers, and strength in the arm, and pulsation in the heart, so He will come with the manifold results of the one gift to you. He will strengthen your understandings, and make you able for loftier tasks of intellect and of reason than you can face in your unaided power; He will dwell in your affections and make them vigorous to lay hold upon the holy things that are above their natural inclination, and will make it certain that their reach shall not be beyond their grasp, as, alas! it so often is in the sadness and disappointments of human love. He will come into that feeble, vacillating, wayward will of yours, that is only obstinate in its adherence to the low and the evil, as some foul creature, that one may try to wrench away, digs its claws into corruption and holds on by that. He will lift your will and make it fix upon the good and abominate the evil, and through the whole being He will pour a great tide of strength which shall cover all the weakness. He will be like some subtle elixir which, taken into the lips, steals through a pallid and wasted frame, and brings back a glow to the cheek and a lustre to the eye, and swiftness to the brain, and power to the whole nature. Or as some plant, drooping and flagging beneath the hot rays of the sun, when it has the scent of water given to it, will, in all its parts, stiffen and erect itself, so, when the Spirit is poured out on men, their whole nature is invigorated and helped.

That indwelling Spirit will be a power for suffering. The parallel passage to this in the twin epistle to the Colossians is—'strengthened with all might unto all patience and long-suffering with gentleness.' Ah, brethren! unless this Divine Spirit were a power for patience and endurance it were no power suited to us poor men. So dark at times is every life; so full at times of discouragements, of dreariness, of sadness, of loneliness, of bitter memories, and of fading hopes does the human heart become, that if we are to be strong we must have a strength that will manifest itself most chiefly in this, that it teaches us how to bear, how to weep, how to submit.

And it will be a power for conflict. We have all of us, in the discharge of duty and in the meeting of temptation, to face such tremendous antagonisms that unless we have grace given to us which will enable us to resist, we shall be overcome and swept away. God's power given by the Divine Spirit does not absolve us from the fight, but it fits us for the fight. It is not given in order that, holiness may be won without a struggle, as some people seem to think, but it is given to us in order that in the struggle for holiness we may never lose 'one jot of heart or hope,' but may be 'able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.'

It is a power for service. 'Tarry ye in Jerusalem till ye be endued with power from on high.' There is no such force for the spreading of Christ's Kingdom, and the witness-bearing work of His Church, as the possession of this Divine Spirit. Plunged into that fiery baptism, the selfishness and the sloth, which stand in the way of so many of us, are all consumed and annihilated, and we are set free for service because the bonds that bound us are burnt up in the merciful furnace of His fiery power.

'Ye shall be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man'—a power that will fill and flood all your nature if you will let it, and will make you strong to suffer, strong to combat, strong to serve, and to witness for your Lord.

III. And now, lastly, let me point you still further to the measure of this power. It is limitless with the boundlessness of God Himself. 'That he would grant you' is the daring petition of the Apostle, 'according to the riches of His glory to be strengthened.'

There is the measure. There is no limit except the uncounted wealth of His own self-manifestation, the flashing light of revealed divinity. Whatsoever there is of splendour in that, whatsoever there is of power there, in these and in nothing on this side of them, lies the limit of the possibilities of a Christian life. Of course there is a working limit at each moment, and that is our capacity to receive; but that capacity varies, may vary indefinitely, may become greater and greater beyond our count or measurement. Our hearts may be more and more capable of God; and in the measure in which they are capable of Him they shall be filled by Him. A limit which is always shifting is no limit at all. A kingdom, the boundaries of which are not the same from one year to another, by reason of its own inherent expansive power, may be said to have no fixed limit. And so we appropriate and enclose, as it were, within our own little fence, a tiny portion of the great prairie that rolls boundlessly to the horizon. But to-morrow we may enclose more, if we will, and more and more; and so ever onwards, for all that is God's is ours, and He has given us His whole self to use and to possess through our faith in His Son. A thimble can only take up a thimbleful of the ocean, but what if the thimble be endowed with a power of expansion which has no term known to men? May it not, then, be that some time or other it shall be able to hold so much of the infinite depth as now seems a dream too audacious to be realised?

So it is with us and God. He lets us come into the vaults, as it were, where in piles and masses the ingots of uncoined and uncounted gold are stored and stacked; and He says, 'Take as much as you like to carry.' There is no limit except the riches of His glory.

And now, dear friends, remember that this great gift, offered to each of us, is offered on conditions. To you professing Christians especially I speak. You will never get it unless you want it, and some of you do not want it. There are plenty of people who call themselves Christian men that would not for the life of them know what to do with this great gift if they had it. You will get it if you desire it. 'Ye have not because ye ask not.'

Oh! when one contrasts the largeness of God's promises and the miserable contradiction to them which the average Christian life of this generation presents, what can we say? 'Hath His mercy clean gone for ever? Doth His promise fail for evermore?' Ye weak Christian people, born weakling and weak ever since, as so many of you are, open your mouths wide. Rise to the height of the expectations and the desires which it is our sin not to cherish; and be sure of this, as we ask so shall we receive. 'Ye are not straitened in God.' Alas! alas! 'ye are straitened in yourselves.'

And mind, there must be self-suppression if there is to be the triumph of a divine power in you. You cannot fight with both classes of weapons. The human must die if the divine is to live. The life of nature, dependence on self, must be weakened and subdued if the life of God is to overcome and to fill you. You must be able to say 'Not I!' or you will never be able to say 'Christ liveth in me.' The patriarch who overcame halted on his thigh; and all the life of nature was lamed and made impotent that the life of grace might prevail. So crush self by the power and for the sake of the Christ, if you would that the Spirit should bear rule over you.

See to it, too, that you use what you have of that Divine Spirit. 'To him that hath shall be given.' What is the use of more water being sent down the mill lade, if the water that does come in it all runs away at the bottom, and none of it goes over the wheel? Use the power you have, and power will come to the faithful steward of what he possesses. He that is faithful in a little shall get much to be faithful over. Ask and use, and the ancient thanksgiving may still come from your lips. 'In the day when I cried, Thou answeredst me, and strengthenedst me with strength in my soul.'

THE INDWELLING CHRIST

'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; ye being rooted and grounded in love.'—EPH. iii. 17.

WE have here the second step of the great staircase by which Paul's fervent desires for his Ephesian friends climbed towards that wonderful summit of his prayers—which is ever approached, never reached,—'that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.'

Two remarks of an expository character will prepare the way for the lessons of these verses. The first is as to the relation of this clause to the preceding. It might appear at first sight to be simply parallel with the former, expressing substantially the same ideas under a somewhat different aspect. The operation of the strength-giving Spirit in the inner man might very naturally be supposed to be equivalent to the dwelling of Christ in our hearts by faith. So many commentators do, in fact, take it; but I think that the two ideas may be distinguished, and that we are to see in the words of our text, as I have said, the second step in this prayer, which is in some sense a result of the 'strengthening with might by the Spirit in the inner man.' I need not enter in detail into the reasons for taking this view of the connection of the clause, which is obviously in accordance with the climbing-up structure of the whole verse. It is enough to point it out as the basis of my further remarks.

And now the second observation with which I will trouble you, before I come to deal with the thoughts of the verse, is as to the connection of the last words of it. You may observe that in reading the words of my text I omitted the 'that' which stands in the centre of the verse. I did so because the words, 'Ye being rooted and grounded in love,' in the original, do stand before the '*that*,' and are distinctly separated by it from the subsequent clause. They ought not, therefore, to be shifted forward into it, as our translators and the Revised Version have, I think, unfortunately done, unless there were some absolute necessity either from meaning or from construction. I do not think that this is the case; but on the contrary, if they are carried forward into the next clause, which describes the result of Christ's dwelling in our hearts by faith, they break the logical flow of the sentence by mixing together result and occasion. And so I attach them to the first part of this verse, and take them to express at once the consequence of Christ's dwelling in the heart by faith, and the preparation or occasion for our being able to comprehend and know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge. Now that is all with which I need trouble you in the way of explanation of the meaning of the words. Let us come now to deal with their substance.

I. Consider the Indwelling of Christ, as desired by the Apostle for all Christians.

To begin with, let me say in the plainest, simplest, strongest way that I can, that that dwelling of Christ in the believing heart is to be regarded as being a plain literal fact.

To a man who does not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ, of course that is nonsense, but to those of us who do see in Him the manifested incarnate God, there ought to be no difficulty in accepting this as the simple literal force of the words before us, that in every soul where faith, howsoever feeble, has been exercised, there Jesus Christ does verily abide.

It is not to be weakened down into any notion of participation in His likeness, sympathy with His character, submission to His influence, following His example, listening to His instruction, or the like. A dead Plato may so influence his followers, but that is not how a living Christ influences His disciples. What is meant is no mere influence derived but separable from Him, however blessed and gracious that influence might be, but it is the presence of His own self, exercising influences which are inseparable from His presence, and only to be realised when He dwells in us.

I think that Christian people as a rule do far too little turn their attention to this aspect of the Gospel teaching, and concentrate their thoughts far too much upon that which is unspeakably precious in itself, but does not exhaust all that Christ is to us, viz. the work that He wrought for us upon Calvary; or to take a step further, the work that He is now carrying on for us as our Intercessor and Advocate in the heavens. You who listen to me Sunday after Sunday will not suspect me of seeking to minimise either of these two aspects of our Lord's mission and operation, but I do believe that very largely the glad thought of an indwelling Christ, who actually abides and works in our hearts, and is not only for us in the heavens, or with us by some kind of impalpable and metaphorical presence, but in simple, that is to say, in spiritual reality is in our spirits, has faded away from the consciousness of the Christian Church.

And so we are called 'mystics' when we preach Christ in the heart. Ah, brother! unless your Christianity be in the good deep sense of the word 'mystical,' it is mechanical, which is worse. I preach, and rejoice that I have to preach, a 'Christ that died, yea! rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' Nor do I stop there, but I preach a Christ that is in us, dwelling in our hearts if we be His at all.

Well, then, further observe that the special emphasis of the prayer here is that this 'indwelling' may be an unbroken and permanent one. Any of you who can consult the original for yourselves will see that the Apostle here uses a compound word which conveys the idea of intensity and continuity. What he desires, then, is not merely that these Ephesian Christians may have occasional visits of the indwelling Lord, or that at some lofty moments of spiritual enthusiasm they may be conscious that He is with them, but that always, in an unbroken line of deep, calm receptiveness, they may possess, and know that they possess, an indwelling Saviour.

And this, I think, is one of the reasons why we may and must distinguish between the apparently very similar petition in the previous verse, about which we spoke in the last sermon, and the petition which is now occupying us; for, as I shall have to show you, it is only as 'strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man,' that we are capable of the continuous abiding of that Lord within us.

Oh! what a contrast to that idea of a perpetual unbroken inhabitation of Jesus in our spirits and to our consciousness is presented by our ordinary life! 'Why shouldst Thou be as a wayfaring man that turneth aside to tarry for a night?' may well be the utterance of the average Christian. We might, with unbroken blessedness, possess Him in our hearts, and instead, we have only 'visits short and far between.' Alas, alas, how often do we drive away that indwelling Christ, because our hearts are 'foul with sin,' so that He

'Can but listen at the gate
And hear the household jar within.'

Christian men and women! here is the ideal of our lives, capable of being approximated to (if not absolutely in its entirety reached) with far more perfection than it ever has yet been by us. There might be a line of light never interrupted running all through our religious experience. Instead of that there is a light point here, and a great gap of darkness there, like the straggling lamps by the wayside in the half-lighted squalid suburbs of some great city. Is that your Christian life, broken by many interruptions, and having often sounding through it the solemn words of the retreating divinity which the old profound legend tells us were heard the night before the Temple on Zion was burnt:—'Let us depart?' 'I will arise and return unto My place till they acknowledge their offences.' God means and wishes that Christ may continuously dwell in our hearts. Does He to your own consciousness dwell in yours?

And then the last thought connected with this first part of my subject is that the heart, strengthened by the Spirit, is fitted to be the Temple of the indwelling Christ. How shall we prepare the chamber for such a guest? How shall some poor occupant of some wretched hut by the wayside fit it up for the abode of a prince? The answer lies in these words that precede my text. You cannot strengthen the rafters and lift the roof and adorn the halls and furnish the floor in a manner befitting the coming of the King; but you can turn to that Divine Spirit who will expand and embellish and invigorate your whole spirit, and make it capable of receiving the indwelling Christ.

That these two things which are here considered as cause and effect may, in another aspect, be considered as but varying phases of the same truth, is only part of the depth and felicity of the teaching that is here; for if you come to look more deeply into it, the Spirit that strengtheneth with might is the Spirit of Christ; and He dwells in men's hearts by His own Spirit. So that the apparent confusion, arising from what in other places are regarded as identical being here conceived as cause and effect, is no confusion at all, but is explained and vindicated by the deep truth that nothing but the indwelling of the Christ can fit for the indwelling of the Christ. The lesser gift of His presence prepares for the greater measure of it; the transitory inhabitation for the more permanent. Where He comes in smaller measure He opens the door and makes the heart capable of His own more entire indwelling. 'Unto him that hath shall be given.' It is Christ in the heart that makes the heart fit for Christ to dwell in the heart. You cannot do it by your own power; turn to Him and let Him make you temples meet for Himself.

II. So now, in the second place, notice the open door through which the Christ comes in to dwell—'that He may dwell in your hearts by faith.'

More accurately we may render 'through faith,' and might even venture to suppose that the thought of faith as an open door through which Christ passes into the heart, floated half distinctly before the Apostle's mind. Be that as it may, at all events faith is here represented as the means or condition through which this dwelling takes effect. You have but to believe in Him and He comes, drawn from heaven, floating down on a sunbeam, as it were, and enters into the heart and abides there.

Trust, which is faith, is self-distrust. 'I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' Rivers do not run on the mountain tops, but down in the valleys. So the heart that is lifted up and self-complacent has no dew of His blessing resting upon it, but has the curse of Gilboa adhering to its barrenness; but the low lands, the humble and the lowly hearts, are they in which the waters that go softly scoop their course and diffuse their blessings. Faith is self-distrust. Self-distrust brings the Christ.

Faith is desire. Never, never in the history of the world has it been or can it be that a longing towards Him shall be a longing thrown back unsatisfied upon itself. You have but to trust, and you possess. We open the door for the entrance of Christ by the simple act of faith, and blessed be His name! He can squeeze Himself through a very little chink, and He does not require that the gates should be flung wide open in order that, with some of His blessings, He may come in.

Mystical Christianity of the false sort has much to say about the indwelling of God in the soul, but it spoils all its teaching by insisting upon it that the condition on which God dwells in the soul is the soul's purifying itself to receive Him. But you cannot cleanse your hearts so as to bring Christ into them, you must let Him come and cleanse them by the process of His coming, and fit them thereby for His own indwelling. And, assuredly, He will so come, purging us from our evil and abiding in our hearts.

But do not forget that the faith which brings Christ into the spirit must be a faith which works by love, if it is to keep Christ in the spirit. You cannot bring that Lord into your hearts by anything that you do. The man who cleanses his own soul by his own strength, and so expects to draw God into it, has made the mistake which Christ pointed out when He told us that when the unclean spirit is gone out of a man he leaves his house empty, though it be swept and garnished. Moral reformation may turn out the devils, it will never bring in God, and in the emptiness of the swept and garnished heart there is an invitation to the seven to come back again and fill it.

And whilst that is true, remember, on the other hand, that a Christian man can drive away his Master by evil works. The sweet song-birds and the honey-making bees are said always to desert a neighbourhood before a pestilence breaks out in it. And if I may so say, similarly quick to feel the first breath of the pestilence is the presence of the Christ which cannot dwell with evil. You bring Christ into your heart by faith, without any work at all; you keep Him there by a faith which produces holiness.

III. And the last point is the gifts of this indwelling Christ,—'ye being,' or as the words might more accurately be translated, 'Ye having been rooted and grounded in love.'

Where He comes He comes not empty-handed. He brings His own love, and that, consciously received, produces a corresponding and answering love in our hearts to Him. So there is no need to ask the question here whether 'love' means Christ's love to me, or my love to Christ. From the nature of the case both are included—the recognition of His love and the response by mine are the result of His entering into the heart. This love, the recognition of His and the response by mine, is represented in a lovely double metaphor in these words as being at once the soil in which our lives are rooted and grow, and the foundation on which our lives are built and are steadfast.

There is no need to enlarge upon these two things, but let me just touch them for a moment. Where Christ abides in a man's heart, love will be the very soil in which his life will be rooted and grow. That love will be the motive of all service, it will underlie, as its productive cause, all fruitfulness. All goodness and all beauty will be its fruit. The whole life will be as a tree planted in this rich soil. And so the life will grow not by effort only, but as by an inherent power drawing its nourishment from the soil. This is blessedness. It is heaven upon earth that love should be the soil in which our obedience is rooted, and from which we draw all the nutriment that turns to flowers and fruit.

Where Christ dwells in the heart, love will be the foundation upon which our lives are builded steadfast and sure. The blessed consciousness of His love, and the joyful answer of my heart to it, may become the basis upon which my whole being shall repose, the underlying thought that gives security, serenity, steadfastness to my else fluctuating life. I may so plant myself upon Him. as that in Him I shall be strong, and then my life will not only grow like a tree and have its leaf green and broad, and its fruit the natural outcome of its vitality, but it will rise like some stately building, course by course, pillar by pillar, until at last the shining topstone is set there. He that buildeth on that foundation shall never be confounded.

For, remember that, deepest of all, the words of my text may mean that the Incarnate Personal Love becomes the very soil in which my life is set and blossoms, on which my life is founded.

> 'Thou, my Life, O let me be
> Rooted, grafted, built in Thee.'

Christ is Love, and Love is Christ. He that is rooted and grounded in love has the roots of his being, and the foundation of his life fixed and fastened in that Lord.

So, dear brethren, go to Christ like those two on the road to Emmaus; and as Fra Angelico has painted them on his convent wall, put out your hands and lay them on His, and say, 'Abide with us. Abide with us!' And the answer will come:—'This is my rest for ever; here'—mystery of love!—'will I dwell, for I have desired it,' even the narrow room of your poor heart.

LOVE UNKNOWABLE AND KNOWN

'That ye . . . may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.'—Eph. iii. 18, 19.

This constitutes the third of the petitions in this great prayer of Paul's, each of which, as we have had occasion to see in former sermons, rises above, and is a consequence of the preceding, and leads on to, and is a cause or occasion of the subsequent one.

The two former petitions have been for inward strength communicated by a Divine Spirit, in order that Christ may dwell in our hearts, and so we may be rooted and grounded in love. The result of these desires being realised in our hearts is here set forth in two clauses which are substantially equivalent in meaning. 'To comprehend' may be taken as meaning nearly the same as 'to know,' only that perhaps the former expresses an act more purely intellectual. And, as we shall see in our next sermon, 'the breadth and length and depth and height' are the unmeasurable dimensions of the love which in the second clause is described as 'passing knowledge.' I purpose to deal with these measures in a separate discourse, and, therefore, omit them from consideration now.

We have, then, mainly two thoughts here, the one, that only the loving heart in which Christ dwells can know the love of Christ; and the other that even that heart can *not* know the love of Christ. The paradox is intentional, but it is intelligible. Let me deal then, as well as I can, with these two great thoughts.

I. First, we have this thought that only the loving heart can know Christ's love.

Now the Bible uses that word *know* to express two different things; one which we call mere intellectual perception; or to put it into plainer words, mere head knowledge such as a man may have about any subject of study, and the other a deep and living experience which is possession before it is knowledge, and knowledge because it is possession.

Now the former of these two, the knowledge which is merely the work of the understanding, is, of course, independent of love. A man may know all about Christ and His love without one spark of love in his heart. And there are thousands of people who, as far as the mere intellectual understanding is concerned, know as much about Jesus Christ and His love as the saint who is closest to the Throne, and yet have not one trace of love to Christ in them. That is the kind of people that a widely diffused Christianity and a habit of hearing sermons produce. There are plenty of them, and some of us among them, who, as far as their heads are concerned, know quite as much of Jesus Christ and His love as any of us do, and could talk about it and argue about it, and draw inferences from it, and have the whole system of evangelical Christianity at their fingers' ends. Ay! It is at their fingers' *ends*, it never gets any nearer them than that.

There is a knowledge with which love has nothing to do, and it is a knowledge that for many people is quite sufficient. 'Knowledge puffeth up,' says the Apostle; into an unwholesome bubble of self-complacency that will one day be pricked and disappear, but 'love buildeth up'—a steadfast, slowly-rising, solid fabric. There be two kinds of knowledge: the mere rattle of notions in a man's brain, like the seeds of a withered poppy-head; very many, very dry, very hard; that will make a noise when you shake them. And there is another kind of knowledge which goes deep down into the heart, and is the only knowledge worth calling by the name; and that knowledge is the child, as my text has it, of love.

Now let us think about that for a moment. Love, says Paul, is the parent of all knowledge. Well, now, can we find any illustrations from similar facts in other regions? Yes! I think so. How do we know, really know, any emotions of any sort whatever? Only by experience. You may talk for ever about feelings, and you teach nothing about them to those who have not experienced them. The poets of the world have been singing about love ever since the world began. But no heart has learned what love is from even the sweetest and deepest songs. Who that is not a father can be taught paternal love by words, or can come to a perception of it by an effort of mind? And so with all other emotions. Only the lips that have drunk the cup of sweetness or of bitterness can tell how sweet or how bitter it is, and even when they, made wise by experience, speak out their deepest hearts, the listeners are but little the wiser, unless they too have been scholars in the same school. Experience is our only teacher in matters of feeling and emotion, as in the lower regions of taste and appetite. A man must be hungry to know what hunger is; he must taste honey or wormwood in order to know the taste of honey or wormwood, and in like manner he cannot know sorrow but by feeling its ache, and must love if he would know love. Experience is our only teacher, and her school-fees are heavy.

Just as a blind man can never be made to understand the glories of sunrise, or the light upon the far-off mountains; just as a deaf man may read books about acoustics, but they will not give him a notion of what is to hear Beethoven, so we must have love to Christ before we know what love to Christ is, and we must consciously experience the love of Christ ere we know what the love of Christ is. We must have love to Christ in order to have a deep and living possession of love of Christ, though reciprocally it is also true that we must have the love of Christ known and felt by our answering hearts, if we are ever to love Him back again.

So in all the play and counterplay of love between Christ and us, and in all the reaction of knowledge and love this remains true, that we must be rooted and grounded in love ere we can know love, and must have Christ dwelling in our hearts, in order to that deep and living possession which, when it is conscious of itself, is knowledge, and is for ever alien to the loveless heart.

'He must be loved, ere that to you
He will seem worthy of your love.'

If you want to know the blessedness of the love of Christ, love Him, and open your hearts for the entrance of His love to you. Love is the parent of deep, true knowledge.

Of course, before we can love an unseen person and believe in his love, we must know about him by the ordinary means by which we learn about all persons outside the circle of our sight. So before the love which is thus the parent of deep, true knowledge, there must be the knowledge by study and credence of the record concerning Christ, which supplies the facts on which alone love can be nourished. The understanding has its part to play in leading the heart to love, and then the heart becomes the true teacher. He that loveth, knoweth God, for God is love. He that is rooted and grounded in love because Christ dwells in his heart, will be strengthened to know the love in which he is rooted. The Christ within us will know the love of Christ. We must first 'taste,' and then we shall 'see' that the Lord is good, as the Psalmist puts it with deep truth. First, the appropriation and feeding upon God, then the clear perception by the mind of the sweetness in the taste. First the enjoyment; then the reflection on the enjoyment. First the love; and then the consciousness of the love of Christ possessed and the love to Christ experienced. The heart must be grounded in love that the man may know the love which passeth knowledge.

Then notice that there is also here another condition for this deep and blessed knowledge laid down in these words, 'That ye may be able to comprehend *with all saints*.' That is to say, our knowledge of the love of Jesus Christ depends largely on our sanctity. If we are pure we shall know. If we were wholly devoted to Him we should wholly know His love to us, and in the measure in which we are pure and holy we shall know it. This heart of ours is like a reflecting telescope, the least breath upon the mirror of which will cause all the starry sublimities that it should shadow forth to fade and become dim. The slightest moisture in the atmosphere, though it be quite imperceptible where we stand, will be dense enough to shut out the fair, shining, snowy summits that girdle the horizon and to leave nothing visible but the lowliness and commonplaceness of the prosaic plain.

If you want to know the love of Christ, first of all, that love must purify your souls. But then you must keep your souls pure, assured of this, that only the single eye is full of light, and that they who are not 'saints' grope in the dark even at midday, and whilst drenched by the sunshine of His love, are unconscious of it altogether. And so we get that miserable and mysterious tragedy of men and women walking through life, as many of you are doing, in the very blaze and focus of Christ's love, and never beholding it nor knowing anything about it.

Observe again the beginning of this path of knowledge, which we have thus traced. There must be, says my text, an indwelling Christ, and so an experience, deep and stable, of His love, and then we shall know the love which we thus experience. But how comes that indwelling? That is the question for us. The knowledge of His love is blessedness, is peace, is love, is everything; as we shall see in considering the last stage of this prayer. That knowledge arises from our fellowship with and our possession of the love of God, which is in Jesus Christ. How does that fellowship with, and possession of the love of God in Jesus Christ, come? That is the all-important question. What is the beginning of everything? 'That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.' There is the gate through which you and I may come, and by which we must come if we are to come at all into the possession and perception of Christ's great love. Here is the path of knowledge. First of all, there must be the simple historical knowledge of the facts of Christ's life and death for us, with the Scripture teaching of their meaning and power. And then we must turn these truths from mere notions into life. It is not enough to know the love that God has to us, in that lower sense of the word 'knowledge.' Many of you know that, who never got any blessing out of it all your days, and never will, unless you change. Besides the 'knowing' there must be the 'believing' of the love. You must translate the notion into a living fact in your experience. You must pass from the simple work of understanding the Gospel to the higher act of faith. You must not be contented with knowing, you must trust. And if you have done that all the rest will follow, and the little, narrow, low doorway of humble self-distrusting faith, through which a man creeps on his knees, leaving outside all his sin and his burden, opens out into the temple palace—the large place in which Christ's love is imparted to the soul.

Brethren, this doctrine of my text ought to be for every one of us a joy and a gospel. There is no royal road into the sweetness and the depth of Christ's love, for the wise or the prudent. The understanding is no more the organ for apprehending the love of Christ than the ear is the organ for perceiving light, or the heart the organ for learning mathematics. Blessed be God! the highest gifts are not bestowed upon the clever people, on the men of genius and the gifted ones, the cultivated and the refined, but they are open for all men; and when we say that love is the parent of knowledge, and that the condition of knowing the depths of Christ's heart is simple love which is the child of faith, we are only saying in other words what the Master embodied in His thanksgiving prayer, 'I thank Thee, Father! Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.'

And that is so, not because Christianity, being a foolish system, can only address itself to fools; not because Christianity, contradicting wisdom, cannot expect to be received by the wise and the cultured, but because a man's brains have as little to do with his trustful acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as a man's eyes have to do with his capacity of hearing a voice. Therefore, seeing that the wise and prudent, and the cultured, and the clever, and the men of genius are always the minority of the race, let us vulgar folk that are neither wise, nor clever, nor cultured, nor geniuses, be thankful that all that has nothing to do with our power of knowing and possessing the best wisdom and the highest treasures, but that upon this path the wayfaring man though a fool shall not err, and all narrow foreheads and limited understandings, and poor, simple uneducated people as well as philosophers and geniuses have to learn love by their hearts and not by their heads, and by a sense of need and a humble trust and a daily experience have to appropriate and suck out the blessing that lies in the love of Jesus Christ. Blessed be His name! The end of all aristocracies of culture and superciliousness of intellect lies in that great truth that we possess the deepest knowledge and highest wisdom when we love and by our love.

II. Now a word in the next place as to the other thought here, that not even the loving heart can know the love of Christ.

'It passeth knowledge,' says my text. Now I do not suppose that the paradox here of knowing the love of Christ which 'passeth knowledge' is to be explained by taking 'know' and 'knowledge' in the two different senses which I have already referred to, so as that we may experience, and know by conscious experience, that love which the mere understanding is incapable of grasping. That of course is an explanation which might be defended, but I take it that it is much truer to the Apostle's meaning to suppose that he uses the words 'know' and 'knowledge' both times in the same sense. And so we get familiar thoughts which I touch upon very briefly.

Our knowledge of Christ's love, though real, is incomplete, and must always be so. You and I believe, I hope, that Christ's love is not a man's love, or at least that it is more than a man's love. We believe that it is the flowing out to us of the love of God, that all the fulness of the divine heart pours itself through that narrow channel of the human nature of our Lord, and therefore that the flow is endless and the Fountain infinite.

I suppose I do not need to show you that it is possible for people to have, and that in fact we do possess a real, a valid, a reliable knowledge of that which is infinite; although we possess, as a matter of course, no adequate and complete knowledge of it. But I only remind you that we have before us in Christ's love something which, though the understanding is not by itself able to grasp it, yet the understanding led by the heart can lay hold of, and can find in it infinite treasures. We can lay our poor hands on His love as a child might lay its tiny palm upon the base of some great cliff, and hold that love in a real grasp of a real knowledge and certitude, but we cannot put our hands round it and feel that we *com*prehend as well as *ap*prehend. Let us be thankful that we cannot.

His love can only become to us a subject of knowledge as it reveals itself in its manifestations. Yet after even these manifestations it remains unuttered and unutterable even by the Cross and grave, even by the glory and the throne. 'It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.'

We have no measure by which we can translate into the terms of our experience, and so bring within the grasp of our minds, what was the depth of the step, which Christ took at the impulse of His love, from the Throne to the Cross. We know not what He forewent; we know not, nor ever shall know, what depths of darkness and soul-agony He passed through at the bidding of His all-enduring love to us. Nor do we know the consequences of that great work of emptying Himself of His glory. We have no means by which we can estimate the darkness and the depth of the misery from which we have been delivered, nor the height and the radiance of the glory to which we are to be lifted. And until we can tell and measure by our compasses both of these two extremes of possible human fate, till we have gone down into the deepest abyss of a bottomless pit of growing alienation and misery, and up above the highest reach of all unending progress into light and glory and God-likeness, we have not stretched our compasses wide enough to touch the two poles of this great sphere, the infinite love of Jesus Christ. So we bow before it, we know that we possess it with a knowledge more sure and certain, more deep and valid, than our knowledge of ought but ourselves; but yet it is beyond our grasp, and towers above us inaccessible in the altitude of its glory, and stretches deep beneath us in the profundity of its condescension.

And, in like manner, we may say that this known love passes knowledge, inasmuch as our experience of it can never exhaust it. We are like the settlers on some great island continent—as, for instance, on the Australian continent for many years after its first discovery—a thin fringe of population round the seaboard here and there, and all the bosom of the land untraversed and unknown. So after all experiences of and all blessed participation in the love of Jesus Christ which come to each of us by our faith, we have but skimmed the surface, but touched the edges, but received a drop of what, if it should come upon us in fulness of flood like a Niagara of love, would overwhelm our spirits.

So we have within our reach not only the treasure of creatural affections which bring gladness into life when they come, and darkness over it when they depart; we have not only human love which, if I may so say, is always lifting its finger to its lips in the act of bidding us adieu; but we may possess a love which will abide with us for ever. Men die, Christ lives. We can exhaust men, we cannot exhaust Christ. We can follow other objects of pursuit, all of which have limitation to their power of satisfying and pall upon the jaded sense sooner or later, or sooner or later are wrenched away from the aching heart. But here is a love into which we can penetrate very deep and fear no exhaustion; a sea into which we can cast ourselves, nor dread that like some rash diver flinging himself into shallow water where he thought there was depth, we may be bruised and wounded. We may find in Christ the endless love that an immortal heart requires. Enter by the low door of faith, and your finite heart will have the joy of an infinite love for its possession, and your mortal life will rise transfigured into an immortal and growing participation in the immortal Love of the indwelling and inexhaustible Christ.

THE PARADOX OF LOVE'S MEASURE

'The breadth, and length, and depth, and height.'—EPH. iii. 18.

OF what? There can, I think, be no doubt as to the answer. The next clause is evidently the continuation of the idea begun in that of our text, and it runs: 'And to know the *love of Christ* which passeth knowledge.' It is the immeasurable measure, then; the boundless bounds and dimensions of the love of Christ which fire the Apostle's thoughts here. Of course, he had no separate idea in his mind attaching to each of these measures of magnitude, but he gathered them together simply to express the one thought of the greatness of Christ's love. Depth and height are the same dimension measured from opposite ends. The one begins at the top and goes down, the other begins at the bottom and goes up, but the distance is the same in either case. So we have the three dimensions of a solid here—breadth, length, and depth.

I suppose that I may venture to use these expressions with a somewhat different purpose from that for which the Apostle employs them; and to see in each of them a separate and blessed aspect of the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

I. What, then, is the breadth of that love?

It is as broad as humanity. As all the stars lie in the firmament, so all creatures rest in the heaven of His love. Mankind has many common characteristics. We all suffer, we all sin, we all hunger, we all aspire, hope, and die; and, blessed be God! we all occupy precisely the same relation to the divine love which lies in Jesus Christ. There are no step-children in God's great family, and none of them receives a more grudging or a less ample share of His love and goodness than every other. Far-stretching as the race, and curtaining it over as some great tent may enclose on a festal day a whole tribe, the breadth of Christ's love is the breadth of humanity.

And it is universal because it is divine. No human mind can be stretched so as to comprehend the whole of the members of mankind, and no human heart can be so emptied of self as to be capable of this absolute universality and impartiality of affection. But the intellectual difficulties which stand in the way of the width of our affections, and the moral difficulties which stand still more frowningly and forbiddingly in the way, have no power over that love of Christ's which is close and tender, and clinging with all the tenderness and closeness and clingingness of a human affection and lofty and universal and passionless and perpetual, with all the height and breadth and calmness and eternity of a divine heart.

And this broad love, broad as humanity, is not shallow because it is broad. Our love is too often like the estuary of some great stream which runs deep and mighty as long as it is held within narrow banks, but as soon as it widens becomes slow and powerless and shallow. The intensity of human affection varies inversely as its extension. A universal philanthropy is a passionless sentiment. But Christ's love is deep though it is wide, and suffers no diminution because it is shared amongst a multitude. It is like the great feast that He Himself spread for five thousand men, women, and children, all seated on the grass, 'and they did all eat and were filled.'

The whole love is the property of each recipient of it. He does not love as we do, who give a part of our heart to this one and a part to that one, and share the treasure of our affections amongst a multitude. All this gift belongs to every one, just as all the sunshine comes to every eye, and as every beholder sees the moon's path across the dark waters, stretching from the place where He stands to the centre of light.

This broad love, universal as humanity, and deep as it is broad, is universal because it is individual. You and I have to generalise, as we say, when we try to extend our affections beyond the limits of household and family and personal friends, and the generalising is a sign of weakness and limitation. Nobody can love an abstraction, but God's love and Christ's love do not proceed in that fashion. He individualises, loving each and therefore loving all. It is because every man has a space in His heart singly and separately and conspicuously, that all men have a place there. So our task is to individualise this broad, universal love, and to say, in the simplicity of a glad faith, 'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' The breadth is world-wide, and the whole breadth is condensed into, if I may so say, a shaft of light which may find its way through the narrowest chink of a single soul. There are two ways of arguing about the love of Christ, both of them valid, and both of them needing to be employed by us. We have a right to say, 'He loves all, therefore He loves me.' And we have a right to say, 'He loves me, therefore He loves all.' For surely the love that has stooped to me can never pass by any human soul.

What is the breadth of the love of Christ? It is broad as mankind, it is narrow as myself.

II. Then, in the next place, what is the length of the love of Christ?

If we are to think of Him only as a man, however exalted and however perfect, you and I have nothing in the world to do with His love. When He was here on earth it may have been sent down through the ages in some vague way, as the shadowy ghost of love may rise in the heart of a great statesman or philanthropist for generations yet unborn, which He dimly sees will be affected by His sacrifice and service. But we do not call that love. Such a poor, pale, shadowy thing has no right to the warm throbbing name; has no right to demand from us any answering thrill of affection. Unless you think of Jesus Christ as something more and other than the purest and the loftiest benevolence that ever dwelt in human form, I know of no intelligible sense in which the length of His love can be stretched to touch you.

If we content ourselves with that altogether inadequate and lame conception of Him and of His nature, of course there is no present bond between any man upon earth and Him, and it is absurd to talk about His present love as extending in any way to me. But we have to believe, rising to the full height of the Christian conception of the nature and person of Christ, that when He was here on earth the divine that dwelt in Him so informed and inspired the human as that the love of His man's heart was able to grasp the whole, and to separate the individuals who should make up the race till the end of time; so as that you and I, looking back over all the centuries, and asking ourselves what is the length of the love of Christ, can say, 'It stretches over all the years, and it reached then, as it reaches now, to touch me, upon whom the ends of the earth have come.' Its length is conterminous with the duration of humanity here or yonder.

That thought of eternal being, when we refer it to God, towers above us and repels us; and when we turn it to ourselves and think of our own life as unending, there come a strangeness and an awe that is almost shrinking, over the thoughtful spirit. But when we transmute it into the thought of a love whose length is unending, then over all the shoreless, misty, melancholy sea of eternity, there gleams a light, and every wavelet flashes up into glory. It is a dreadful thing to think, 'For ever, Thou art God.' It is a solemn thing to think, 'For ever I am to be'; but it is life to say: 'O Christ! Thy love endureth from everlasting to everlasting; and because it lives, I shall live also'—'Oh! give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever.'

There is another measure of the length of the love of Christ. 'Master! How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?—I say not unto thee until seven times, but until seventy times seven.' So said the Christ, multiplying perfection into itself twice—two sevens and a ten—in order to express the idea of boundlessness. And the law that He laid down for His servant is the law that binds Himself. What is the length of the love of Christ? Here is one measure of it—howsoever long drawn out my sin may be, this is longer; and the white line of His love runs out into infinity, far beyond the point where the black line of my sin stops. Anything short of eternal patience would have been long ago exhausted by your sins and mine, and our brethren's. But the pitying Christ, the eternal Lover of all wandering souls, looks down from heaven upon every one of us; goes with us in all our wanderings, bears with us in all our sins, in all our transgressions still is gracious. His pleadings sound on, like some stop in an organ continuously persistent through all the other notes. And round His throne are written the divine words which have been spoken about our human love modelled after His: 'Charity suffereth long and is kind; is not easily provoked, is not soon angry, beareth all things.' The length of the love of Christ is the length of eternity, and outmeasures all human sin.

III. Then again, what is the depth of that love?

Depth and height, as I said at the beginning of these remarks, are but two ways of expressing the same dimension. For the one we begin at the top and measure down, for the other we begin at the bottom and measure up. The top is the Throne; and the downward measure, how is it to be stated? In what terms of distance are we to express it? How far is it from the Throne of the Universe to the manger of Bethlehem, and the Cross of Calvary, and the sepulchre in the garden? That is the depth of the love of Christ. Howsoever far may be the distance from that loftiness of co-equal divinity in the bosom of the Father, and radiant with glory, to the lowliness of the form of a servant, and the sorrows, limitations, rejections, pains and death—that is the measure of the depth of Christ's love. We can estimate the depth of the love of Christ by saying, 'He came from above, He tabernacled with us,' as if some planet were to burst from its track and plunge downwards in amongst the mist and the narrowness of our earthly atmosphere.

A well-known modern scientist has hazarded the speculation that the origin of life on this planet has been the falling upon it of the fragments of a meteor, or an aerolite from some other system, with a speck of organic life upon it, from which all has developed. Whatever may be the case in regard to physical life, that is absolutely true in the case of spiritual life. It all originates because this heaven-descended Christ has come down the long staircase of Incarnation, and has brought with Him into the clouds and oppressions of our terrestrial atmosphere a germ of life which He has planted in the heart of the race, there to spread for ever. That is the measure of the depth of the love of Christ.

And there is another way to measure it. My sins are deep, my helpless miseries are deep, but they are shallow as compared with the love that goes down beneath all sin, that is deeper than all sorrow, that is deeper than all necessity, that shrinks from no degradation, that turns away from no squalor, that abhors no wickedness so as to avert its face from it. The purest passion of human benevolence cannot but sometimes be aware of disgust mingling with its pity and its efforts, but Christ's love comes down to the most sunken. However far in the abyss of degradation any human soul has descended, beneath it are the everlasting arms, and beneath it is Christ's love. When a coalpit gets blocked up by some explosion, no brave rescuing party will venture to descend into the lowest depths of the poisonous darkness until some ventilation has been restored. But this loving Christ goes down, down, down into the thickest, most pestilential atmosphere, reeking with sin and corruption, and stretches out a rescuing hand to the most abject and undermost of all the victims. How deep is the love of Christ! The deep mines of sin and of alienation are all undermined and countermined by His love. Sin is an abyss, a mystery, how deep only they know who have fought against it; but

> 'O love! thou bottomless abyss,
> My sins are swallowed up in thee.'

'I will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.' The depths of Christ's love go down beneath all human necessity, sorrow, suffering, and sin.

IV. And lastly, what is the height of the love of Christ?

We found that the way to measure the depth was to begin at the Throne, and go down to the Cross, and to the foul abysses of evil. The way to measure the height is to begin at the Cross and the foul abysses of evil, and to go up to the Throne. That is to say, the topmost thing in the Universe, the shining apex and pinnacle, glittering away up there in the radiant unsetting light, is the love of God in Jesus Christ. Other conceptions of that divine nature spring high above us and tower beyond our thoughts, but the summit of them all, the very topmost as it is the very bottommost, outside of everything, and therefore high above everything, is the love of God which has been revealed to us all, and brought close to us sinful men in the manhood and passion of our dear Christ.

And that love which thus towers above us, and gleams like the shining cross on the top of some lofty cathedral spire, does not flash up there inaccessible, nor lie before us like some pathless precipice, up which nothing that has not wings can ever hope to rise, but the height of the love of Christ is an hospitable height, which can be scaled by us. Nay, rather, that heaven of love which is 'higher than our thoughts,' bends down, as by a kind of optical delusion the physical heaven seems to do towards each of us, only with this blessed difference, that in the natural world the place where heaven touches earth is always the furthest point of distance from us; and in the spiritual world the place where heaven stoops to me is always right over my head, and the nearest possible point to me. He has come to lift us to Himself, and this is the height of His love, that it bears us, if we will, up and up to sit upon that throne where He Himself is enthroned.

So, brethren, Christ's love is round about us all, as some sunny tropical sea may embosom in its violet waves a multitude of luxuriant and happy islets. So all of us, islanded on our little individual lives, lie in that great ocean of love, all the dimensions of which are immeasurable, and which stretches above, beneath, around, shoreless, tideless, bottomless, endless.

But, remember, this ocean of love you can shut out of your lives. It is possible to plunge a jar into mid-Atlantic, further than soundings have ever descended, and to bring it up on deck as dry inside as if it had been lying on an oven. It is possible for men and women —and I have them listening to me at this moment —to live and move and have their being in that sea of love, and never to have let one drop of its richest gifts into their hearts or their lives. Open your hearts for Him to come in, by humble faith in His great sacrifice for you. For if Christ dwell in your heart by faith, then and only then will experience be your guide ; and you will be able to comprehend the boundless greatness, the endless duration, and absolute perfection, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge.

THE CLIMAX OF ALL PRAYER

'That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.'—Eph. iii. 19.

The Apostle's many-linked prayer, which we have been considering in successive sermons, has reached its height. It soars to the very Throne of God. There can be nothing above or beyond this wonderful petition. Rather, it might seem as if it were too much to ask, and as if, in the ecstasy of prayer, Paul had forgotten the limits that separate the creature from the Creator, as well as the experience of sinful and imperfect men, and had sought to 'wind himself too high for mortal life beneath the sky.' And yet Paul's prayers are God's promises; and we are justified in taking these rapturous petitions as being distinct declarations of God's desire and purpose for each of us; as being the end which He had in view in the unspeakable gift of His Son; and as being the certain outcome of His gracious working on all believing hearts.

It seems at first a paradoxical impossibility; looked at more deeply and carefully it becomes a possibility for each of us, and therefore a duty; a certainty for all the redeemed in fullest measure hereafter; and, alas! a rebuke to our low lives and feeble expectations. Let us look, then, at the petition, with the desire of sounding, as we may, its depths and realising its preciousness.

I. First of all, think with me of the significance of this prayer.

'The fulness of God' is another expression for the whole sum and aggregate of all the energies, powers, and attributes of the divine nature, the total Godhead in its plenitude and abundance.

'God is love,' we say. What does that mean, but that God desires to impart His whole self to the creatures whom He loves? What is love in its lofty and purest forms, even as we see them here on earth; what is love except the infinite longing to bestow one's self? And when we proclaim that which is the summit and climax of the revelation of our Father in the person of His Son, and say with the last utterances of Scripture that 'God is love,' we do in other words proclaim that the very nature and deepest desire and purpose of the divine heart is to pour itself on the emptiness and need of His lowly creatures in floods that keep back nothing. Lofty, wonderful, incomprehensible to the mere understanding as this thought may be, clearly it is the inmost meaning of all that Scripture tells us about God as being the 'portion of His people,' and about us, as being by Christ and in Christ 'heirs of God,' and possessors of Himself.

We have, then, as the promise that gleams from these great words, this wonderful prospect, that the divine love, truth, holiness, joy, in all their rich plenitude of all-sufficient abundance, may be showered upon us. The whole Godhead is our possession; for the fulness of God is no far-off remote treasure that lies beyond human grasp and outside of human experience. Do not we believe that, to use the words of this Apostle in another letter, 'it pleased the Father that in Him should all the fulness dwell'? Do we not believe that, to use the words of the same epistle, 'In Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily'? Is not that abundance of the resources of the whole Deity insphered and incarnated in Jesus Christ our Lord, that it may be near us, and that we may put out our hand and touch it? This may be a paradox for the understanding, full of metaphysical puzzles and cobwebs, but for the heart that knows Christ, most true and precious. God is gathered into Jesus Christ, and all the fulness of God, whatever that may mean, is embodied in the Man Christ Jesus, that from Him it may be communicated to every soul that will.

For, to quote other words of another of the New Testament teachers, 'Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace,' and to quote words in another part of the same epistle, we may 'all come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' High above us, then, and inaccessible though that awful thought, 'the fulness of God,' may seem, as the zenith of the unscaleable heavens seems to us poor creatures creeping here upon the flat earth, it comes near, near, near, ever nearer, and at last tabernacles among us, when we think that in Him all the fulness dwells, and it comes nearer yet and enters into our hearts when we think that 'of His fulness have we all received.'

Then, still further, observe another of the words in this petition :—'That ye may be filled.' That is to say, Paul's prayer and God's purpose and desire concerning us is, that our whole being may be so saturated and charged with an indwelling divinity as that there shall be no room in our present stature and capacity for more, and no sense of want or aching emptiness.

Ah, brethren! when we think of how eagerly we have drunk at the stinking puddles of earth, and how after every draught there has yet been left a thirst that was pain, it is something for us to hear Him say:—'The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life,'—and 'he that drinketh of this water shall never thirst.' Our empty hearts, with their experiences of the insufficiency and the vanity of all earthly satisfaction, stand there like the water-pots at the rustic marriage, and the Master says, 'Fill them to the brim.' And then, by His touch, the water of our poor savourless, earthly enjoyments is transmuted and elevated into the new wine of His Kingdom. We may be filled, satisfied with the fulness of God.

There is another point as to the significance of this prayer, on which I must briefly touch. As our Revised Version will tell you, the literal rendering of my text is, 'filled *unto*' (not exactly *with*) 'all the fulness of God'; which suggests the idea not of a completed work but of a process, and of a growing process, as if more and more of that great fulness might pass into a man. Suppose a number of vessels, according to the old illustration about degrees of glory in heaven; they are each full, but the quantity that one contains is much less than that which the other may hold. Add to the illustration that the vessels can grow, and that filling makes them grow; as a shrunken bladder when you pass gas into it will expand and round itself out, and all the creases will be smoothed away. Such is the Apostle's idea here, that a process of filling goes on which may satisfy the then desires, because it fills us up to the then capacities of our spirits; but in the very process of so filling and satisfying makes those spirits capable of containing larger measures of His fulness, which therefore flow into it. Such, as I take it, in rude and faint outline, is the significance of this great prayer.

II. Now turn, in the next place, to consider briefly the possibility of the accomplishments of this petition.

As I said, it sounds as if it were too much to desire. Certainly no wish can go beyond this wish. The question is, can a sane and humble wish go as far as this; and can a man pray such a prayer with any real belief that he will get it answered here and now? I say yes!

There are two difficulties that at once start up.

People will say, does such a prayer as this upon man's lips not forget the limits that bound the creature's capacity? Can the finite contain the Infinite?

Well, that is a verbal puzzle, and I answer, yes! The finite can contain the Infinite, if you are talking about two hearts that love, one of them God's and one of them mine. We have got to keep very clear and distinct before our minds the broad, firm line of demarcation between the creature and the Creator, or else we get into a pantheistic region where both creature and Creator expire. But there is a Christian as well as an atheistic pantheism, and as long as we retain clearly in our minds the consciousness of the personal distinction between God and His child, so as that the child can turn round and say, 'I love Thee,' and God can look down and say, 'I bless thee'; then all identification and mutual indwelling and impartation from Him of Himself are possible, and are held forth as the aim and end of Christian life.

Of course in a mere abstract and philosophical sense the Infinite cannot be contained by the finite; and attributes which express infinity, like omnipresence and omniscience and omnipotence and so on, indicate things in God that we can know but little about, and that cannot be communicated. But those are not the divinest things in God. 'God is love.' Do you believe that that saying unveils the deepest things in Him? God is light, 'and in Him is no darkness at all.' Do you believe that His light and His love are nearer the centre than these attributes of power and infinitude? If we believe that, then we can come back to my text and say, 'The love, which is Thee, can come into me; the light, which is Thee, can pour itself into my darkness; the holiness, which is Thee, can enter into my impurity. The heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee. Thou dwellest in the humble and in the contrite heart.'

So, dear brethren, the old legends about mighty forms that contracted their stature and bowed their divine heads to enter into some poor man's hut, and sit there, are simple Christian realities. And instead of puzzling ourselves with metaphysical difficulties which are mere shadows, and the work of the understanding or the spawn of words, let us listen to the Christ when He says, 'We will come unto him and make our abode with him,' and believe that it was no impossibility which fired the Apostle's hope when he prayed, and in praying prophesied, that we might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Then there is another difficulty that rises before our minds; and Christian men say, 'How is it possible, in this region of imperfection, compassed with infirmity and sin as we are, that such hopes should be realised for us here?' Well, I would rather answer that question by retorting and saying: 'How is it possible that such a prayer should have come from inspired lips unless the thing that Paul was asking might be?' Did he waste his breath when he thus prayed? Are we not as Christian men bound, instead of measuring our expectations by our attainments, to try to stretch our attainments to what are our legitimate expectations, and to hear in these words the answer to the faithless and unbelieving doubt whether such a thing is possible, and the assurance that it is possible.

An impossibility can never be a duty, and yet we are commanded: 'Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect.' An impossibility can never be a duty, and yet we are commanded to let Christ abide in our hearts.

Oh! if we believed less in the power of our sin it would have less power upon us. If we believed more in the power of an indwelling Christ He would have more power within us. If we said to ourselves, 'It is possible,' we should make it possible. The impossibility arises only from our own weakness, from our own sinful weakness; and though it may be true, and is true, that none of us will live without sin as long as we abide here, it is also true that each moment of interruption of our communion with Christ and therefore each moment of interruption of that being 'filled with the fulness of God,' might have been avoided. We know about every such time that we could have helped it if we had liked, and it is no use bringing any general principles about sin cleaving to men in order to break the force of that conviction. But if that conviction be a real one, and if whenever a Christian man loses the consciousness of God in his heart, making him blessed, he is obliged to say: 'It was my own fault and Thou wouldst have stayed if I had chosen,' then there follows from this, that it is possible, notwithstanding all the imperfection and sin of earth, that we may be 'filled with all the fulness of God.'

So, dear brethren, take you this prayer as the standard of your expectations; and oh! take it as we must all take it, as the sharpest of rebukes to our actual attainments in holiness and in likeness to our Master. Set by the side of these wondrous and solemn words—'filled with the fulness of God,' the facts of the lives of the average professing Christians of this generation, and of this congregation; their emptiness, their ignorance of the divine indwelling, their want of anything in their experience that corresponds in the least degree to such words as these. Judge whether a man is not more likely to be bowed down in wholesome sense of his own sinfulness and unworthiness, if he has before him such an ideal as this of my text, than if it, too, has faded out of his life. I believe, for my part, that one great cause of the worldliness and the sinfulness and mechanical formalities that are eating the life out of the Christianity of this generation is the fact of the Church having largely lost any real belief in the possibility that Christian men may possess the fulness of God as their present experience. And so, when they do not find it in themselves they say: 'Oh! it is all right; it is the necessary result of our imperfect fleshly condition.' No! It is all wrong; and His purpose is that we should possess Him in the fulness of His gladdening and hallowing power, at every moment in our happy lives.

III. One word to close with, as to the means by which this prayer may be fulfilled.

Remember, it comes as the last link in a chain. I shall have wasted my breath for a month, as far as you are concerned, if you do not feel that the preceding links are needful before this can be attained.

But I only touch upon the nearest of them and remind you that it must be Christ dwelling in our hearts, that fills them with the fulness of God. Where He comes God comes. And where does He come? He comes where faith opens the door for Him. If you will trust Jesus Christ, if you will distrust yourselves, if you will turn your thoughts and your hearts to Him, if you will let Him come into your souls, and not shut Him out because your souls are so full that there is no room for Him there, then when He comes He will not come empty-handed, but will bring the full Godhead with Him.

There must be the emptying of self, if there is to be the filling with God. And the emptying of self is realised in that faith which forsakes self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-dependence, self-control, self-pleasing, and yields itself wholly to the dear Lord.

There is another condition that is required, and that is the previous link in this braided chain. The conscious experience of the love which is in Christ will bring to us 'the fulness of God.' Love is power; love is God; and when we live in the sense and experience of God's love to us then we have the power and we have the God. It is as in some of these petrifying streams, the water is charged with particles which it deposits upon everything that is laid in its course. So, if we plunge our hearts into that fountain of the love of Christ, as it flows it will clothe us with all the divine energies which are held in solution in the divinest thing in God—His own love. Plunged into the love we are filled with the fulness.

Then keep near your Master. It all comes to that. Meditate upon Him; do not let days pass, as they do pass, without a thought being turned to Him. Do not go about your daily work without a remembrance of Him. Keep yourselves in Christ. Seek to experience His love, that love which passeth knowledge, and is only known by them who possess it. And then, as the old painters with deep truth used to paint the Apostle of Love with a face like his Master, living near Christ and looking upon Him you will receive of His fulness, and 'we all, with open face, beholding the glory, shall be changed into the glory.'

MEASURELESS POWER AND ENDLESS GLORY

'Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, 21. Unto Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages. world without end. Amen.' —Eph. iii. 20, 21.

One purpose and blessing of faithful prayer is to enlarge the desires which it expresses, and to make us think more loftily of the grace to which we appeal. So the Apostle, in the wonderful series of supplications which precedes the text, has found his thought of what he may hope for his brethren at Ephesus grow greater with every clause. His prayer rises like some song-bird, in ever-widening sweeps, each higher in the blue, and nearer the throne; and at each a sweeter, fuller note.

'Strengthened with might by His Spirit'; 'that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith'; 'that ye may be able to know the love of Christ'; 'that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.' Here he touches the very throne. Beyond that nothing can be conceived. But though that sublime petition may be the end of thought, it is not the end of faith. Though God can give us nothing more than it is, He can give us more than we think it to be, and more than we ask, when we ask this. Therefore the grand doxology of our text crowns and surpasses even this great prayer. The higher true prayer climbs, the wider is its view; and the wider is its view, the more conscious is it that the horizon of its vision is far within the borders of the goodly land. And as we gaze into what we can discern of the fulness of God, prayer will melt into thanksgiving and the doxology for the swift answer will follow close upon the last words of supplication. So is it here; so it may be always.

The form of our text then marks the confidence of Paul's prayer. The exuberant fervour of his faith, as well as his natural impetuosity and ardour, comes out in the heaped-up words expressive of immensity and duration. He is like some archer watching, with parted lips, the flight of his arrow to the mark. He is gazing on God confident that he has not asked in vain. Let us look with him, that we, too, may be heartened to expect great things of God. Notice then—

I. The measure of the power to which we trust.

This epistle is remarkable for its frequent references to the divine rule, or standard, or measure, in accordance with which the great facts of redemption take place. The 'things on the earth'—the historical processes by which salvation is brought to men and works in men—are ever traced up to the 'things in heaven'; the divine counsels from which they have come forth. That phrase, 'according to,' is perpetually occurring in this connection in the epistle. It is applied mainly in two directions. It serves sometimes to bring into view the ground, or reason, of the redemptive facts, as, for instance, in the expression that these take place 'according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself.' It serves sometimes to bring into view the measure by which the working of these redemptive facts is determined; as in our text, and in many other places.

Now there are three main forms under which this standard, or measure, of the Redeeming Power is set forth in this epistle, and it will help us to grasp the greatness of the Apostle's thought if we consider these.

Take, then, first, that clause in the earlier portion of the preceding prayer, 'that He would grant you according to the riches of His glory.' The measure, then, of the gift that we may hope to receive is the measure of God's own fulness. The 'riches of His glory' can be nothing less than the whole uncounted abundance of that majestic and far-shining Nature, as it pours itself forth in the dazzling perfectness of its own Self-manifestation. And nothing less than this great treasure is to be the limit and standard of His gift to us. We are the sons of the King, and the allowance which He makes us even before we come to our inheritance is proportionate to our Father's wealth. The same stupendous thought is given us in that prayer, heavy with the blessed weight of unspeakable gifts, 'that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.' This, then, is the measure of the grace that we may possess. This limitless limit alone bounds the possibilities for every man, the certainties for every Christian.

The effect must be proportioned to the cause. And what effect will be adequate as the outcome of such a cause as 'the riches of His glory'? Nothing short of absolute perfectness, the full transmutation of our dark, cold being into the reflected image of His own burning brightness, the ceaseless replenishing of our own spirits with all graces and gladnesses akin to His, the eternal growth of the soul upward and Godward. Perfection is the sign manual of God in all His works, just as imperfection and the falling below our thought and wish is our 'token in every epistle' and deed of ours. Take the finest needle, and put it below a microscope, and it will be all ragged and irregular, the fine, tapering lines will be broken by many a bulge and bend, and the point blunt and clumsy. Put the blade of grass to the same test, and see how regular its outline, how delicate and true the spear-head of its point. God's work is perfect, man's is clumsy and incomplete. God does not leave off till He has finished. When He rests, it is because, looking on His work, He sees it all 'very good.' His Sabbath is the Sabbath of an achieved purpose, of a fulfilled counsel. The palaces which we build are ever like that one in the story, where one window remains dark and unjewelled, while the rest blaze in beauty. But when God builds, none can say, 'He was not able to finish.' In His great palace He makes her 'windows of agates' and *all* her 'borders of pleasant stones.'

So we have a right to enlarge our desires and stretch our confidence of what we may possess and become to this, His boundless bound—'The riches of glory.'

But another form in which the standard, or measure, is stated in this letter is: 'The working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead' (i. 19, 20); or, as it is put with a modification, 'grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ' (iv. 7). That is to say, we have not only the whole riches of the divine glory as the measure to which we may lift our hopes, but lest that celestial brightness should seem too high above us, and too far from us, we have Christ in His human-divine manifestation, and especially in the great fact of the Resurrection, set before us, that by Him we may learn what God wills we should become. The former phase of the standard may sound abstract, cloudy, hard to connect with any definite anticipations; and so this form of it is concrete, historical, and gives human features to the fair ideal. His Resurrection is the high-water mark of the divine power, and to the same level it will rise again in regard to every Christian. The Lord, in the glory of His risen life, and in the riches of the gifts which He received when He ascended up on high, is the pattern for us, and the power which fulfils its own pattern. In Him we see what man may become, and what His followers must become. The limits of that power will not be reached until every

Christian soul is perfectly assimilated to that likeness, and bears all its beauty in its face, nor till every Christian soul is raised to participation in Christ's dignity and sits on His throne. Then, and not till then, shall the purpose of God be fulfilled and the gift which is measured by the riches of the Father's glory, and the fulness of the Son's grace, be possessed or conceived in its measureless measure.

But there is a third form in which this same standard is represented. That is the form which is found in our text, and in other places of the epistle: 'According to the power that worketh in us.'

What power is that but the power of the Spirit of God dwelling in us? And thus we have the measure, or standard, set forth in terms respectively applying to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. For the first, the riches of His glory; for the second, His Resurrection and Ascension; for the third, His energy working in Christian souls. The first carries us up into the mysteries of God, where the air is almost too subtle for our gross lungs; the second draws nearer to earth and points us to an historical fact that happened in this everyday world; the third comes still nearer to us, and bids us look within, and see whether what we are conscious of there, if we interpret it by the light of these other measures, will not yield results as great as theirs, and open before us the same fair prospect of perfect holiness and conformity to the divine nature.

There is already a Power at work within us, if we be Christians, of whose workings we may be aware, and from them forecast the measure of the gifts which it can bestow upon us. We may estimate what will be by what we know has been, and by what we feel is. That is to say, in other words, the effects already produced, and the experiences we have already had, carry in them the pledge of completeness.

I suppose that if the mediæval dream had ever come true, and an alchemist had ever turned a grain of lead into gold, he could have turned all the lead in the world in time, and with crucibles and furnaces enough. The first step is all the difficulty, and if you and I have been changed from enemies into sons, and had one spark of love to God kindled in our hearts, that is a mightier change than any that remains to be effected in order to make us perfect. One grain has been changed, the whole mass will be so in due time.

The present operations of that power carry in them the pledge of their own completion. The strange mingling of good and evil in our present nature, our aspirations so crossed and contradicted, our resolution so broken and falsified, the gleams of light, and the eclipses that follow—all these in their opposition to each other, are plainly transitory, and the workings of that Power within us, though they be often overborne, are as plainly the stronger in their nature, and meant to conquer and to endure. Like some half-hewn block, such as travellers find in long abandoned quarries, whence Egyptian temples, that were destined never to be completed, were built, our spirits are but partly 'polished after the similitude of a palace,' while much remains in the rough. The builders of these temples have mouldered away and their unfinished handiwork will lie as it was when the last chisel touched it centuries ago, till the crack of doom; but stones for God's temple will be wrought to completeness and set in their places. The whole threefold divine cause of our salvation supplies the measure, and lays the foundation for our hopes, in the glory of the Father, the grace of the Son, the power of the Holy Ghost. Let us lift up our cry: 'Perfect that which concerneth me, forsake not the works of thine own hands,' and we shall have for answer the ancient word, fresh as when it sounded long ago from among the stars to the sleeper at the ladder's foot, 'I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.'

II. Notice the relation of the divine working to our thoughts and desires.

The Apostle in his fervid way strains language to express how far the possibility of the divine working extends. He is able, not only to do all things, but 'beyond all things'—a vehement way of putting the boundless reach of that gracious power. And what he means by this 'beyond all things' is more fully expressed in the next words, in which he labours by accumulating synonyms to convey his sense of the transcendent energy which waits to bless: 'exceeding abundantly above what we ask.' And as, alas! our desires are but shrunken and narrow beside our thoughts, he sweeps a wider orbit when he adds 'above what we *think*.' He has been asking wonderful things, and yet even his farthest-reaching petitions fall far on this side of the greatness of God's power. One might think that even it could go no further than filling us 'with all the fulness of God.' Nor can it; but it may far transcend our conceptions of what that is, and astonish us by its surpassing our thoughts, no less than it shames us by exceeding our prayers.

Of course, all this is true, and is meant to apply, only about the inward gifts of God's grace. I need not remind you that, in the outer world of Providence and earthly gifts, prayers and wishes often surpass the answers; that there a deeper wisdom often contradicts our thoughts and a truer kindness refuses our petitions, and that so the rapturous words of our text are only true in a very modified and partial sense about God's working *for* us in the world. It is His work *in* us concerning which they are absolutely true.

Of course we know that in all regions of His working He is *able* to surpass our poor human conceptions, and that, properly speaking, the most familiar, and, as we insolently call them, 'smallest' of His works holds in it a mystery—were it none other than the mystery of Being—against which Thought has been breaking its teeth ever since men began to think at all.

But as regards the working of God on our spiritual lives, this passing beyond the bounds of thought and desire is but the necessary result of the fact already dealt with, that the only measure of the power is God Himself, in that Threefold Being. That being so, no plummet of our making can reach to the bottom of the abyss; no strong-winged thought can fly to the outermost bound of the encircling heaven. Widely as we stretch our reverent conceptions, there is ever something beyond. After we have resolved many a dim nebula in the starry sky, and found it all ablaze with suns and worlds, there will still hang, faint and far before us, hazy magnificences which we have not apprehended. Confidently and boldly as we may offer our prayers, and largely as we may expect, the answer is ever more than the petition. For indeed, in every act of His quickening grace, in every God-given increase of our knowledge of God, in every bestowment of His fulness, there is always more bestowed than we receive, more than we know even while we possess it. Like some gift given in the dark, its true preciousness is not discerned when it is first received. The gleam of the gold does not strike our eye all at once. There is ever an unknown margin felt by us to be over after our capacity of receiving is exhausted. 'And they took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full.'

So, then, let us remember that while our thoughts and prayers can never reach to the full perception, or reception either, of the gift, the exuberant amplitude with which it reaches far beyond both is meant to draw both after it. And let us not forget either that, while the grace which we receive has no limit or measure but the fulness of God, the working limit, which determines what we receive of the grace, is these very thoughts and wishes which it surpasses. We may have as much of God as we can hold, as much as we wish. All Niagara may roar past a man's door, but only as much as he diverts through his own sluice will drive his mill, or quench his thirst. God's grace is like the figures in the Eastern tales, that will creep into a narrow room no bigger than a nutshell, or will tower heaven high. Our spirits are like the magic tent whose walls expanded or contracted at the owner's wish—we may enlarge them to enclose far more of the grace than we have ever possessed. We are not straitened in God, but in ourselves. He is 'able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think.' Therefore let us stretch desires and thoughts to their utmost, remembering that, while they can never reach the measure of His grace in itself, they make the practical measure of our possession of it. 'According to thy faith' is the real measure of the gift received, even though 'according to the riches of His glory' be the measure of the gift bestowed. Note, again,

III. The glory that springs from the divine work.

'The glory of God' is the lustre of His own perfect character, the bright sum total of all the blended brilliances that compose His name. When that light is welcomed and adored by men, they are said to 'give glory to God,' and this doxology is at once a prophecy that the working of God's power on His redeemed children will issue in setting forth the radiance of His Name yet more, and a prayer that it may. So we have here the great thought expressed in many places of Scripture, that the highest exhibition of the divine character for the reverence and love—of the whole universe, shall we say?—lies in His work on Christian souls, and the effect produced thereby on them. God takes His stand, so to speak, on this great fact in His dealings, and will have His creatures estimate Him by it. He reckons it His highest praise that He has redeemed men, and by His dwelling in them fills them with His own fulness. And this chiefest praise and brightest glory accrues to Him 'in the Church in Christ Jesus.' The weakening of the latter word into '*by* Christ Jesus,' as in the English version, is to be regretted, as substituting another thought, Scriptural no doubt and precious, for the precise shade of meaning in the Apostle's mind here. As has been well said, 'the first words denote the outward province; the second, the inward and spiritual sphere in which God was to be praised.' His glory is to shine in the Church, the theatre of His power, the standing demonstration of the might of redeeming love. By this He will be judged, and this He will point to if any ask what is

His divinest work, which bears the clearest imprint of His divinest self. His glory is to be set forth by men on condition that they are 'in Christ,' living and moving in Him, in that mysterious but most real union without which no fruit grows on the dead branches, nor any music of praise breaks from the dead lips.

So, then, think of that wonder that God sets His glory in His dealings with us. Amid all the majesty of His works and all the blaze of His creation, this is what He presents as the highest specimen of His power—the Church of Jesus Christ, the company of poor men, wearied and conscious of many evils, who follow afar off the footsteps of their Lord. How dusty and toil-worn the little group of Christians that landed at Puteoli must have looked as they toiled along the Appian Way and entered Rome! How contemptuously emperor and philosopher and priest and patrician would have curled their lips, if they had been told that in that little knot of Jewish prisoners lay a power before which theirs would cower and finally fade! Even so is it still. Among all the splendours of this great universe, and the mere obtrusive tawdrinesses of earth, men look upon us Christians as poor enough; and yet it is to His redeemed children that God has entrusted His praise, and in their hands that He has lodged the sacred deposit of His own glory.

Think loftily of that office and honour, lowly of yourselves who have it laid upon you as a crown. His honour is in our hands. We are the 'secretaries of His praise.' This is the highest function that any creature can discharge. The Rabbis have a beautiful bit of teaching buried among their rubbish about angels. They say that there are two kinds of angels—the angels of service and the angels of praise, of which two orders the latter is the higher, and that no angel in it praises God twice, but having once lifted up his voice in the psalm of heaven, then perishes and ceases to be. He has perfected his being, he has reached the height of his greatness, he has done what he was made for, let him fade away. The garb of legend is mean enough, but the thought it embodies is that ever true and solemn one, without which life is nought—'Man's chief end is to glorify God.'

And we can only fulfil that high purpose in the measure of our union with Christ. 'In Him' abiding, we manifest God's glory, for in Him abiding we receive God's grace. So long as we are joined to Him, we partake of His life, and our lives become music and praise. The electric current flows from Him through all souls that are 'in Him,' and they glow with fair colours which they owe to their contact with Jesus. Interrupt the communication, and all is darkness. So, brethren, let us seek to abide in Him, severed from whom we are nothing. Then shall we fulfil the purpose of His love, who 'hath shined in our hearts,' that we might give to others 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Notice, lastly,

IV. The eternity of the work and of the praise.

As in the former clauses the idea of the transcendent greatness of the power of God was expressed by accumulated synonyms, so here the kindred thought of its eternity, and consequently of the ceaseless duration of the resulting glory, is sought to be set forth by a similar aggregation. The language creaks and labours, as it were, under the weight of the great conception. Literally rendered, the words are—'to all generations of the age of the ages'—a remarkable fusing together of two expressions for unbounded duration, which are scarcely congruous. We can understand 'to all generations' as expressive of duration as long as birth and death shall last. We can understand 'the age of the ages' as pointing to that endless epoch whose moments are 'ages'; but the blending of the two is but an unconscious acknowledgment that the speech of earth, saturated, as it is, with the colouring of time, breaks down in the attempt to express the thought of eternity. Undoubtedly that solemn conception is the one intended by this strange phrase.

The work is to go on for ever and ever, and with it the praise. As the ages which are the beats of the pendulum of eternity come and go, more and more of God's power will flow out to us, and more and more of God's glory will be manifested in us. It must be so; for God's gift is infinite, and man's capacity of reception is indefinitely capable of increase. Therefore eternity will be needful in order that redeemed souls may absorb all of God which He can give or they can take. The process has no limits, for there is no bound to be set to the possible approaches of the human spirit to the divine, and none to the exuberant abundance of the beauty and glory which God will give to His child. Therefore we shall live for ever: and for ever show forth His praise and blaze out like the sun with the irradiation of His glory. We cannot die till we have exhausted God. Till we comprehend all His nature in our thoughts, and reflect all His beauty in our character; till we have attained all the bliss that we can think, and received all the good that we can ask;

till Hope has nothing before her to reach towards, and God is left behind: we 'shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.'

Let His grace work on you, and yield yourselves to Him, that His fulness may fill your emptiness. So on earth we shall be delivered from hopes which mock and wishes that are never fulfilled. So in heaven, after 'ages of ages' of growing glory, we shall have to say, as each new wave of the shoreless, sunlit sea bears us onward, 'It doth not yet appear what we shall be.'

THE CALLING AND THE KINGDOM

'I beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.'—EPH. iv. 1.

'They shall walk with Me in white; for they are worthy.'—REV. iii. 4.

THE estimate formed of a centurion by the elders of the Jews was, 'He is worthy for whom Thou shouldst do this,' and in contrast therewith the estimate formed by himself was, 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof.' From these two statements we deduce the thought that merit has no place in the Christian's salvation, but all is to be traced to undeserved, gracious love. But that principle, true and all-important as it is, like every other great truth, may be exaggerated, and may be so isolated as to become untrue and a source of much evil. And so I desire to turn to the other side of the shield, and to emphasise the place that worthiness has in the Christian life, and its personal results both here and hereafter. To say that character has nothing to do with blessedness is untrue, both to conscience and to the Christian revelation; and however we trace all things to grace, we must also remember that we get what we have fitted ourselves for.

Now, my two texts bring out two aspects which have to be taken in conjunction. The one of them speaks about the present life, and lays it as an imperative obligation on all Christian people to be worthy of their Christianity, and the other carries us into the future and shows us that there it is they who are 'worthy' who attain to the Kingdom. So I think I shall best bring out what I desire to emphasise if I just take these two points—the Christian calling and the life that is worthy of it, and the Christian heaven and the life that is worthy of it.

I. The Christian calling and the life that is worthy of it.

'I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.' Now, that thought recurs in other places in the Apostle's writings, somewhat modified in expression. For instance, in one passage he speaks of 'walking worthily of the God who has called us to His kingdom and glory,' and in another of the Christian man's duty to 'walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing.' There is a certain vocation to which a Christian man is bound to make his life correspond, and his conduct should be in some measure worthy of the ideal that is set before it. Now, we shall best understand what is involved in such worthiness if we make clear to ourselves what the Apostle means by this 'calling' to which he appeals as containing in itself a standard to which our lives are to be conformed.

Suppose we try to put away the technical word 'calling,' and instead of 'calling' say 'summons,' which is nearer the idea, because it conveys the notions more fully of the urgency of the voice, and of the authority of the voice, which speaks to us. And what is that summons? How do we hear it? One of the other Apostles speaks of God as calling us 'by His own glory and virtue,' that is to say, wherever God reveals Himself in any fashion, and by any medium, to a man, the man fails to understand the deepest meaning of the revelation unless his purged ear hears in it the great voice saying, 'Come up hither.' For all God's self-manifestation, in the creatures around us, in the deep voice of our own souls, in the mysteries of our own personal lives, and in the slow evolution of His purpose through the history of the world, all these revelations of God bear in them the summons to us that hear and see them to draw near to Him, and to mould ourselves into His likeness. And thus, just as the sun by the effluence of its beams gathers all the ministering planets, as it were, round its feet, and draws them to itself, so God, raying Himself out into the waste, fills the waste with magnetic influences which are meant to draw men to nobleness, goodness, God-pleasingness, and God-likeness.

But in another place in this Apostle's writings we read of 'the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.' Yes, there, as focussed into one strong voice, all the summonses are concentrated and gathered. For in Jesus Christ we see the possibilities of humanity realised, and we have the pattern of what we ought to be, and are called thereby to be. And in Christ we get the great motives which make this summons, as it comes mended from His lips, no longer the mere harsh voice of an authoritative legislator, but the gentle invitation, 'Come unto Me, . . . and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' The summons is honeyed, sweetened, and made infinitely mightier when we hear it from His gracious lips. It is the blessed peculiarity of the Christian ideal, that the manifestation of the ideal carries with it the power to realise it. And just as the increasing strength of the spring sunshine summons the buds from out of their folds, and the snowdrops hear the call and force themselves through the frozen soil, so when Christ summons He inclines the ears that hear, and enables the men that own them to obey the summons, and to be what they are commanded. And thus we have 'the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.'

Now, if that is the call, if the life of Christ is that to which we are summoned, and the death of Christ is that by which we are inclined to obey the summons, and the Spirit of Christ is that by which we are enabled to do so, what sort of a life will be worthy of these? Well, the context supplies part of the answer. 'I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation . . . with all meekness and lowliness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love.' That is one side of the vocation, and the life that is worthy of it will be a life emancipated from the meanness of selfishness, and delivered from the tumidities of pride and arrogance, and changed into the sweetness of gentleness and the royalties of love.

And then, on the other side, in one of the other texts where the same general set of ideas is involved, we get a yet more wondrous exhibition of the life which the Apostle considered to be worthy. I simply signalise its points of detail without venturing to dwell upon them. 'Unto all pleasing'; the first characteristic of life that is 'worthy of our calling,' and to which, therefore, every one of us Christian people is imperatively bound, is that it shall, in all its parts, please God, and that is a large demand. Then follow details: 'Fruitful in every good work'—a many-sided fruitfulness, an encyclopædiacal beneficent activity, covering all the ground of possible excellence; and that is not all; 'increasing in the knowledge of God,'—a life of progressive acquaintance with Him; and that is not all:—'strengthened with all might unto all patience and long-suffering'; nor is that all, for the crown of the whole is 'giving thanks unto the Father.' So, then, 'ye see your calling, brethren.' A life that is 'worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called' is a life that conforms to the divine will, that is 'fruitful in all good,' that is progressive in its acquaintance with God, that is strengthened for all patience and long-suffering, and that in everything is thankful to Him. That is what we are summoned to be, and unless we are in some measure obeying the summons, and bringing out such a life in our conduct, then, notwithstanding all that we have to say about unmerited mercy, and free grace, and undeserved love, and salvation being not by works but by faith, we have no right to claim the mercy to which we say we trust.

Now, this necessity of a worthy life is perfectly harmonious with the great truth that, after all, every man owes all to the undeserved mercy of God. The more nearly we come to realise the purpose of our calling, the more 'worthy' of it we are, the deeper will be our consciousness of our unworthiness. The more we approximate to the ideal, and come closer up to it, and so see its features the better, the more we shall feel how unlike we are to it. The law for Christian progress is that the sense of unworthiness increases in the precise degree in which the worthiness increases. The same man that said, 'Of whom (sinners) I am chief,' said to the same reader, 'I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.' And so the two things are not contradictory but complementary. On the one side 'worthy' has nothing to do with the outflow of Christ's love to us · on the other side we are to 'walk worthy of the vocation wherewith we are called.'

II. And now, let us turn to the other thought, the Christian heaven and the life that is worthy of it.

Some of you, I have no doubt, would think that that was a tremendous heresy if there were not Scriptural words to buttress it. Let us see what it means. My text out of the Revelation says, 'They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.' And the same voice that spake these, to some of us, astounding, words, said, when He was here on earth, 'They which shall be counted worthy to attain to the life of the resurrection from the dead,' etc. The text brings out very clearly the continuity and congruity between the life on earth and the life in heaven. Who is it of whom it is said that 'they are worthy' to 'walk in white'? It is the 'few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.' You see the connection; clean robes here and shining robes hereafter; the two go together, and you cannot separate them. And no belief that salvation, in its incipient germ here, and salvation in its fulness hereafter, are the results 'not of works of righteousness which we have done, but of His mercy,' is to be allowed to interfere with that other truth that they who are worthy attain to the Kingdom.

I must not be diverted from my main purpose, tempting as the theme would be, to say more than just a sentence about what is included in that great promise, 'They shall walk with Me in white.' And if I do touch upon it at all, it is only in order to bring out more clearly that the very nature of the heavenly reward demands this worthiness which the text lays down as the condition of possessing it. 'They shall walk'—activity on an external world. That opens a great door, but perhaps we had better be contented just with looking in. 'They shall walk'—progress; 'with me'—union with Jesus Christ; 'in white'—resplendent purity of character. Now take these four things—activity on an outward universe, progress, union with Christ, resplendent purity of character, and you have almost all that we know of the future; the rest is partly doubtful and is mostly symbolical or negative, and in any case subordinate. Never mind about 'physical theories of another life'; never mind about all the questions—to some of us how torturing they sometimes are!—concerning that future life. The more we keep ourselves within the broad limits of these promises that are intertwined and folded up together in that one saying, 'They shall walk with Me in white,' the better, I think, for the sanity and the spirituality of our conception of a future life.

That being understood, the next thing clearly follows, that only those who in the sense of the word as it is used here, are 'worthy,' can enter upon the possession of such a heaven. From the nature of the gift it is clear that there must be a moral and religious congruity between the gift and the recipient, or, to put it into plainer words, you cannot get heaven unless your nature is capable of receiving these great gifts which constitute heaven. People talk about the future state as being 'a state of retribution.' Well! that is not altogether a satisfactory form of expression.

for retribution may convey the idea, such as is presented in earthly rewards and punishments, of there being no natural correspondence between the crime and its punishment, or the virtue and its reward. A bit of bronze shaped into the form of a cross may be the retribution 'For Valour,' and a prison cell may be the retribution by legal appointment for a certain crime. But that is not the way that God deals out rewards and punishments in the life which is to come. It is not a case of retribution, meaning thereby the arbitrary bestowment of a certain fixed gift in response to certain virtues, but it is a case of *outcome*, and the old metaphor of sowing and reaping is the true one. We sow here and we reap yonder. We pass into that future, 'bringing our sheaves with us,' and we have to grind the corn and make bread of it, and we have to eat the work of our own hands. They drink as they have brewed. 'Their works do follow them,' or they go before them and 'receive them into everlasting habitations.' Outcome, the necessary result, and not a mere arbitrary retribution, is the relation which heaven bears to earth.

That is plain, too, from our own nature. We carry ourselves with us wherever we go. The persistence of character, the continuity of personal being, the continuity of memory, the *unobliterable*—if I may coin a word—results upon ourselves of our actions, all these things make it certain that what looks to us a cleft, deep and broad, between the present life and the next, is to those that have passed it, and see it from the other side, but a little crack in the soil scarcely observable, and that we carry on into another world the selves that we have made here. Whatever death does —and it does a great deal that we do not know of—it does not alter, it only brings out, and, as I suppose, intensifies, the main drift and set of a character. And so they who 'have not defiled their garments shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.'

Ah, brethren! how solemn that makes life; the fleeting moment carries Eternity in its bosom. It passes, and the works pass, but nothing human ever dies, and we bear with us the net results of all the yesterdays into that eternal to-day. You write upon a thin film of paper and there is a black leaf below it. Yes, and below the black leaf there is another sheet, and all that you write on the top one goes through the dark interposed page, and is recorded on the third, and one day that will be taken out of the book, and you will have to read it and say, 'What I have written I have written.'

So, dear friends, whilst we begin with that unmerited love, and that same unmerited love is the sole ground on which the gates of the kingdom of heaven are by the Death and Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ opened to believers, their place there depends not only on faith but on the work which is the fruit of faith. There is such a thing as being 'saved yet so as by fire,' and there is such a thing as 'having an entrance ministered abundantly unto us'; we have to make the choice. There is such a thing as the sore punishment of which they are thought worthy who have rejected the Son of God, and counted the blood of the Covenant an unholy thing; and there is such a thing as a man saying, 'I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come unto me,' and Christ answering, 'He shall walk with Me in white, for he is worthy,' and we have to make that choice also.

'THE THREEFOLD UNITY'

'One Lord, one faith, one baptism.'—EPH. iv. 5.

THE thought of the unity of the Church is very prominent in this epistle. It is difficult for us, amidst our present divisions, to realise how strange and wonderful it then was that a bond should have been found which drew together men of all nations, ranks, and characters. Pharisee and philosopher, high-born women and slaves, Roman patricians and gladiators, Asiatic Greeks and Syrian Jews forgot their feuds and sat together as one in Christ. It is no wonder that Paul in this letter dwells so long and earnestly on that strange fact. He is exhorting here to a unity of spirit corresponding to it, and he names a seven-fold oneness—one body and one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. The outward institution of the Church, as a manifest visible fact, comes first in the catalogue. One Father is last, and between these there lie the mention of the one Spirit and the one Lord. The 'body' is the Church. 'Spirit, Lord, God,' are the triune divine personality. Hope and faith are human acts by which men are joined to God; Baptism is the visible symbol of their incorporation into the one body. These three clauses of our text may be considered as substantially including all the members of the series. We deal with them quite simply now, and consider them in the order in which they stand here.

I. The one Lord.

The deep foundation of Christian unity is laid in the divine Christ. Here, as generally in the New Testament, the name 'Lord' designates Christ in His authority as ruler of men and in His divinity as Incarnation of God. It would not be going too far to suggest that we have in the name, standing as it does, for the most part, in majestic simplicity, a reference to the Old Testament name of Jehovah, which in the Greek translation familiar to Paul is generally rendered by this same word. Nor can we ignore the fact that in this great catalogue of the Christian unities the Lord stands in the centre of the three personalities named, and is regarded as being at once the source of the Spirit and the manifestation of the Father. The place which this name occupies in relation to the Faith which is next named suggests that the living personal Christ is the true uniting principle amongst men. The one body realises its oneness in its common relation to the one Lord. It is one, not because of identity in doctrine, not because of any of the bonds which hold men together in human associations, precious and sacred as many of these are, but 'we being many are one bread, for we are all partakers of that one bread.' The magnet draws all the particles to itself and holds them in a mysterious unity.

II. One faith.

The former clause set forth in one great name all the objective elements of the Church's oneness; this clause sets forth, with equally all-comprehending simplicity, the subjective element which makes a Christian. The one Lord, in the fulness of His nature and the perfectness of His work, is the all-inclusive object of faith. He, in His own living person, and not any dogmas about Him, is regarded as the strong support round which the tendrils of faith cling and twine and grow. True, He is made known to us as possessing certain attributes and as doing certain things which, when stated in words, become doctrines, and a Christ without these will never be the object of faith. The antithesis which is so often drawn between Christ's person and Christian doctrines is by no means sound, though the warning not to substitute the latter for the former is only too necessary at all times.

The subjective act which lays hold of Christ is faith, which in our text has its usual meaning of saving trust, and is entirely misconceived if it is taken, as it sometimes is, to mean the whole body of beliefs which make up the Christian creed. That which unites us to Jesus Christ is an infinitely deeper thing than the acceptance of any creed. A man may believe thirty-nine or thirty-nine hundred articles without having any real or vital connection with the one Lord. The faith which saves is the outgoing of the whole self towards Christ. In it the understanding, the emotions, and the will are all in action. The New Testament *faith* is absolutely identical with the Old Testament *trust*, and the prophet who exhorted Israel, 'Trust ye in the Lord for ever, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength,' was preaching the very same message as the Apostle who cried, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.'

That 'saving faith' is the same in all Christians, however different they may be in condition and character and general outlook and opinion upon many points of Christian knowledge. The things on which they differ are on the surface, and sometimes by reason of their divergencies Christians stand like frowning cliffs that look threateningly at one another across a narrow gorge, but deep below ground they are continuous and the rock is unbroken. In many and melancholy ways 'the unity of faith and knowledge' is contradicted in the existing organisations of the Church, and we are tempted to postpone its coming to the day of the new Jerusalem which is compact together; but the clarion note of this great text may encourage us to hope, and to labour in our measure for the fulfilment of the hope, that all, who by one faith have been joined to the one Lord, may yet know themselves to be one in Him, and present to the world the fair picture of one body animated by one spirit.

III. One baptism.

Obviously in Paul's mind baptism here means, not the baptism with the Spirit, but the rite, one and the same for all, by which believers in Christ enter into the fellowship of the Church. It was then a perpetual rite administered as a matter of course to all who professed to have been joined to the one Lord by their one faith. The sequence in the three clauses of our text is perfectly clear. Baptism is the expression and consequence of the faith which precedes it. Surely there is here a most distinct implication that it is a declaration of personal faith. Without enlarging on the subject, I venture to think that the order of the Apostle's thought negatives other conceptions of Christian baptism, such as, that it is a communication of Grace, or an expression of the feelings and desires of parents, or a declaration of some truth about redeemed humanity. Paul's order is Christ's when He said, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'

It is very remarkable and instructive that whilst thus our text shows that baptism was a matter of course and universally practised, the references to it in the epistles are so few. The inference is not that it was neglected, but that, as being a rite, it could not be as important as were Christian truths and Christian character. May we, in a word, suggest the contrast between the frequency and tone of the Apostolic references to baptism and those which we find in many quarters to-day?

It is remarkable that here the Lord's Supper is not mentioned, and all the more so, that in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, the passage which we have already quoted does put emphasis upon it as a token of Christian unity. The explanation of the omission may be found in the fact that, in these early days, the Lord's Supper was not a separate rite, but was combined with ordinary meals, or perhaps more probably in the consideration that baptism was what the Lord's Supper was not—an initial rite which incorporated the possessors of one faith into the one body.

'THE MEASURE OF GRACE'

'But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ.'—EPH. iv. 7 (R.V.).

THE Apostle here makes a swift transition from the thought of the unity of the Church to the variety of gifts to the individual. 'Each' is contrasted with 'all.' The Father who stands in so blessed and gracious a relationship to the united whole also sustains an equally gracious and blessed relationship to each individual in that whole. It is because each receives His individual gift that God works in all. The Christian community is the perfection of individualism and of collectivism, and this rich variety of the gifts of grace is here urged as a reason additional to the unity of the one body, for the exhortation to the endeavour to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

I. Each Christian soul receives grace through Christ.

The more accurate rendering of the Revised Version reads '*the* grace,' and the definite article points to it as a definite and familiar fact in the Ephesian believers to which the Apostle could point with the certainty that their own consciousness would confirm his statement. The wording of the Greek further implies that the grace was given at a definite point in the past, which is most naturally taken to have been the moment in which each believer laid hold on Jesus by faith. It is further to be noted that the content of the gift is the grace itself and not the graces which are its product and manifestation in the Christian life. And this distinction, which is in accordance with Paul's habitual teaching, leads us to the conclusion, that the essential character of the grace given through the act of our individual faith is that of a new vital force, flowing into and transforming the individual life. From that unspeakable gift which Paul supposed to be verifiable by the individual experience of every Christian, there would follow the graces of Christian character in which would be included the deepening and purifying of all the natural capacities of the individual self, and the casting out from thence of all that was contrary to the transforming power of the new life.

Such an utterance as this, so quietly and confidently taking for granted that the experience of every believer verifies it in his own case, may well drive us all to look more earnestly into our own hearts, to see whether in them are any traces of a similar experience. If it be true, that to every one of us is given *the* grace, how comes it that so many of us dare not profess to have any vivid remembrance of possessing it, of having possessed it, or of any clear consciousness of possessing it now? There may be gifts bestowed upon unconscious receivers, but surely this is not one of these. If we do not know that we have it, it must at least remain very questionable whether we do have it at all, and very certain that we have it in scant and shrivelled fashion.

The universality of the gift was a startling thing in a world which, as far as cultivated heathenism was concerned, might rightly be called aristocratic, and by the side of a religion of privilege into which Judaism had degenerated. The supercilious sarcasm in the lips of Pharisees, 'This people which knoweth not the law are cursed,' but too truly expresses the gulf between the Rabbis and the 'folk of the earth,' as the masses were commonly and contemptuously designated by the former. Into the midst of a society in which such distinctions prevailed, the proclamation that the greatest gift was bestowed upon all must have come with revolutionary force, and been hailed as emancipation. Peter had penetrated to grasp the full meaning and wondrous novelty of that universality, when on Pentecost he pointed to 'that which had been spoken by the prophet Joel' as fulfilled on that day, 'I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh . . . Yea, and on my servants and handmaidens . . . will I pour forth of my Spirit.' The rushing, mighty wind of that day soon dropped. The fiery tongues ceased to quiver on the disciples' heads, and the many voices that spoke were silenced, but the gift was permanent, and is poured out now as it was then, and now, as then, it is true that the whole company of believers receive the Spirit, though alas! by their own faults it is not true that 'they are all *filled* with the Holy Spirit.'

Christ is the giver. He has 'power over the Spirit of Holiness,' and as the Evangelist has said in his comment on our Lord's great words, when 'He stood and cried,' 'If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink,' 'This spake He of the Spirit which they that believed on Him were to receive.' We cannot pierce into the depth of the mutual relations of the three divine Persons mentioned in the context, but we can discern that Christ is for us the self-revealing activity of the divine nature, the right arm of the Father, or, to use another metaphor, the channel through which the else 'closed sea' of God flows into the world of creatures. Through that channel is poured into believing hearts the river of the water of life, which proceeds out of the one 'throne of God and of the Lamb.' This gift of the Spirit of Holiness to all believers is the deepest and truest conception of Christ's gifts to His Church. His past work of sacrifice for the sins of the world was finished, as with a parting cry He proclaimed on Calvary, and the power of that sacrifice will never be exhausted, but the taking away of the sins of the world is but the initial stage of the work of Christ, and its further stages are carried on through all the ages. He 'worketh hitherto,' and His present work, in so far as believers are concerned, is not only the forthputting of divine energy in regard to outward circumstances, but the imparting to them of the Divine Spirit to be the very life of their lives and the Lord of their spirits. Christian people are but too apt to give undue prominence to what Christ did for them when He died, and to lose sight, in the overwhelming lustre of His unspeakable sacrifice, of what He is doing for them whilst He lives. It would tend to restore the proportions of Christian truth and to touch our hearts into a deeper and more continuous love to Him, if we more habitually thought of Him, not only as the Christ who died, but also as the Christ who rather is risen again, who

is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

II. The gift of this grace is in itself unlimited.

Our text speaks of it as being according to the measure of the gift of Christ, and that phrase may either mean the gift which Christ receives or that which He gives. Probably the latter is the Apostle's meaning here, as seems to be indicated by the following words that 'when He ascended on high, He gave gifts unto men,' but what He gives is what He possesses, and the Apostle goes on to point out that the ultimate issue of His giving to the Church is that it attains to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

It may cast some light on this point if we note the remarkable variety of expressions in this epistle for the norm or standard or limit of the gift. In one place the Apostle speaks of the gift bestowed upon believers as being according to the riches of the Father's glory; then it has no limit short of a participation in the divine fulness. God's glory is the transcendent lustre of His own infinite character in its self-manifestation. The Apostle labours to flash through the dim medium of words the glory of that light by blending incongruously, but effectively, the other metaphor of riches, and the two together suggest a wonderful, though vague thought of the infinite wealth and the exhaustless brightness which we call Abba, Father. The humblest child may lift longing and confident eyes and believe that he has received in very deed, through his faith in Jesus Christ, a gift which will increase in riches and in light until it makes him perfect as his Father in heaven was perfect. It was an old faith, based upon insight far inferior to ours, which proclaimed with triumph over the frowns of death. 'I shall be satisfied when I awake with Thy likeness.' Would that those who have so much more for faith to build on, built as nobly as did these!

The gift has in itself no limit short of participation in the likeness of Christ. In another place in this letter the measure of that might which is the guarantee of Christian hope is set forth with an abundance of expression which might almost sound as an unmeaning accumulation of synonyms, as being 'according to the working of the strength of His might which He wrought in Christ'; and what is the range of the working of that might is disclosed to our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus, and the setting of Him high above all rule and authority and power and lordship and every creature in the present or in any future. Paul's continual teaching is that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was wrought in Him, not as a mere human individual but as our head and representative. Through Him we rise, not only from an ethical death of sin and separation from God, but we shall rise from physical death, and in Him the humblest believer possessing a vital union with the Lord of life has a share in His dominion, and, as His own faithful word has promised, sits with Him on His throne, even as He is set down with the Father on His throne.

That gift has in itself no limit short of its own energy. In another part of this epistle the Apostle indicates the measure up to which our being filled is to take effect, as being 'all the fulness of God,' and in such an overwhelming vision breaks forth into fervent praise of Him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, and then supplies us with a measure which may widen and heighten our petitions and expectations when He tells us that we are to find the measure of God's working for us, not in the impoverishment of our present possessions, but in the exceeding riches of the power that worketh in us—that is to say, that we are to look for the limit of the limitless gift in nothing short of the boundless energy of God Himself. In the Epistle to the Colossians Paul uses the same illustration with an individual reference to his own labours. In our text he associates with himself all believers, as being conscious of a power working in them, which is really the limitless power of God, and heartens them to anticipate that whatever limitless power can effect in them will certainly be theirs. God does not leave off till He has done and till He can look upon His completed work and pronounce it very good.

III. This boundless grace is in each individual case bounded for the time by our own faith.

When I lived near the New Forest I used to hear much of what they called 'rolling fences.' A man received or took a little piece of Crown land on which he built a house and put round it a fence which could be judiciously and silently pushed outwards by slow degrees and enclosed, year by year, a wider area. We Christian people have, as it were, our own small, cultivated plot on the boundless prairie, the extent of which we measure for ourselves and which we can enlarge as we will. We have been speaking of the various aspects under which the boundlessness of the gift is presented by the Apostle, but there is another 'according to' in Christ's own words, 'According to your faith be it unto you,' and that statement lays down the practical limits of our present possession of the boundless gift. We have as much as we desire; we have as much as we take; we have as much as we use; we have as much as we can hold. We are admitted into the treasure house, and all around us lie ingots of gold and vessels full of coins; we ourselves determine how much of the treasure should be ours, and if at any time we feel like empty-handed paupers rather than like possible millionaires, the reason lies in our own slowness to take that which is freely given to us of God. His word to us all is, 'Ye are not straitened in Me, ye are straitened in yourselves.' It is well for us to keep ever before us the boundlessness of the gift in itself and the working limit in ourselves which conditions our actual possession of the riches. For so, on the one hand, should we be encouraged to expect great things from God, and, on the other hand, be humbled by the contrast between what we might be and what we are. The river that rushes full of water from the throne can send but a narrow and shallow trickle through the narrow channel choked with much rubbish, which we provide for it. It is of little avail that the sun in the heavens pours down its flood of light and warmth if the windows of our hearts are by our own faults so darkened that but a stray beam, shorn of its brightness and warmth, can find its way into our darkness. The first lesson which we have to draw from the contrast between the boundlessness of the gift and the narrow limits of our individual possession and experience of it, is the lesson of penitent recognition and confession of the unbelief which lurks in our strongest faith. 'Lord I believe, help Thou mine unbelief,' should be the prayer of every Christian soul.

Not less surely will the recognition that the form and amount of the grace of God, which is possessed by each, is determined by the faith of each, lead to tolerance of the diversity of gifts. We have received our own proper gift of God, that which the strength and purity of our faith is capable of possessing, and it is not for us to carp at our brethren, either at those in advance of us or at those behind us. We have to remember that as it takes all sorts of people to make up a world, so it takes all varieties of Christian character to make a church. It is the body and not the individual members which represents Christ to the world. The firmest adherence to our own form of the universal gift will combine with the widest toleration of the gifts of others. The white light appears when red, green, and blue blend together, not when each tries to be the other. 'Every man hath his own proper gift of God, one after this fashion and another after that,' and we shall be true to the boundlessness of the gift and to the limitations of our own possession of it, in the measure of which we combine obedience to the light which shines in us, with thankful recognition of that which is granted to others.

The contrast between these two must be kept vivid if we would live in the freedom of the hope of the glory of God, for in the contrast lies the assurance of endless growth. A process is begun in every Christian soul of which the only natural end is the full possession of God in Christ, and that full possession can never be reached by a finite creature, but that does not mean that the ideal mocks us and retreats before us like the pot of gold, which the children fancy is at the end of the rainbow. Rather it means a continuous succession of our realisations of the ideal in ever fuller and more blessed reality. In this life we may, on condition of our growth in faith, grow in the possession of the fulness of God, and yet at each moment that possession will be greater, though at all moments we may be filled. In the Christian life to-morrow may be safely reckoned as destined to be 'as yesterday and much more abundant,' and when we pass from the imperfections of the most perfect earthly life, there will still remain ever before us the glory, which, according to the measure of our capacity, is also in us, and we shall draw nearer and nearer to it, and be for ever receiving into our expanding spirits more and more of the infinite fulness of God.

THE GOAL OF PROGRESS

'Till we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'—EPH. iv. 13 (R.V.).

THE thought of the unity of the Church is much in the Apostle's mind in this epistle. It is set forth in many places by his two favourite metaphors of the body and the temple, by the relation of husband and wife and by the family. It is contemplated in its great historical realisation by the union of Jew and Gentile in one whole. In the preceding context it is set forth as already existing, but also as lying far-off in the future. The chapter begins with an earnest exhortation to preserve this unity and with an exhibition of the oneness which does really exist in body, spirit, hope, lord, faith, baptism. But the Apostle swiftly passes to the corresponding thought of diversity. There are varieties in the gifts of the one Spirit; whilst each individual in the one whole receives his due portion, there are broad differences in spiritual gifts. These differences do not break the oneness, but they may tend to do so; they are not causes of separation and do not necessarily interfere with unity, but they may be made so. Their existence leaves room for brotherly helpfulness, and creates a necessity for it. The wiser are to teach; the more advanced are to lead; the more largely gifted are to encourage and stimulate the less richly endowed. Such outward helps and brotherly impartations of gifts is, on the one hand, a result of the one gift to the whole body, and is on the other a sign of, because a necessity arising from, the imperfect degree in which each individual has received of Christ's fulness; and these helps of teaching and guidance have for their sole object to make Christian men able to do without them, and are, as the text tells us, to cease when, and to last till, we all attain to the fulness of Christ. To Paul, then, the manifest unity of the Church was to be the end of its earthly course, but it also was real, though incomplete, in the present, and the emphasis of our text is not so much laid on telling us when this oneness was to be manifested as in showing us in what it consists. We have here a threefold expression of the true unity, as consisting in a oneness of relation to Christ, a consequent maturity of manhood and a perfect possession of all which is in Christ.

I. The true unity is oneness of relation to Christ.

The Revised Version is here to be preferred, and its 'attain unto' brings out the idea which the Authorised Version fails to express, that the text is intended to point to the period at which Christ's provision of helpful gifts to the growing Church is to cease, when the individuals composing it have come to their destined unity and maturity in Him. The three clauses of our text are each introduced by the same preposition, and there is no reason why in the second and third it should be rendered 'unto' and in the first should be watered down to 'in.'

There are then two regions in which this unity is to be realised. These are expressed by the great words, 'the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.' These words are open to a misunderstanding, as if they referred to a unity as between faith and knowledge; but it is obvious to the slightest reflection that what is meant is the unity of all believers in regard to their faith, and in regard to their knowledge. It is to be noted that the Apostle has just said that there is one faith, now he points to the realisation of that oneness as the very end and goal of all discipline and growth. I suppose that we have to think here of the manifold and sad differences existing in Christian men, in regard to the depth and constancy and formative power of their faith. There are some who have it so strong and vigorous that it is a vision rather than a faith, a trust, deep and firm and settled, to which the present is but the fleeting shadow, and the unseen the eternal and only reality; but, alas! there are others in whom the light of faith burns feebly and flickers. Nor are these differences the attributes of different men, but the same man varies in the power of his faith, and we all of us know what it is to have it sometimes dominant over our whole selves, and sometimes weak and crushed under the weight of earthly passions. To-day we may be all flame, to-morrow all ice. Our faith may seem to us to be strong enough to move mountains, and before an hour is past we may find it, by experience, to be less than a grain of mustard seed. 'Action and reaction are always equal and contrary,' and that law is as true in reference to our present spiritual life as it is true in regard to physical objects. We have, then, the encouragement of such a word as that of our text for looking forward to and straining towards the reversal of these sad alterations in a fixed and continuous faith which should grasp the whole Christ and should always hold Him There may still be diversities and degrees, but each should have his measure always full. 'Thy Sun shall no more go down'; there will no longer be the contrast between the flashing waters of a flood-tide and the dreary mud-banks disclosed at low water. We shall stand at different points, but the faces of all will be turned to Him who is the Light of all, and every face will shine with the likeness of His, when we see Him as He is.

But our text points us to another form of unity—the oneness of the knowledge of the Son of God.

The Apostle uses an emphatic term which is very familiar on his lips to designate this knowledge. It means not a mere intellectual apprehension, but a profound and vital acquaintance, dependent indeed upon faith, and realised in experience. It is the knowledge for which Paul was ready to 'count all things but loss' that he might know Jesus, and winning which he would count himself to 'have apprehended.' The unity in this deep and blessed knowledge has nothing to do with identity of opinion on the points which have separated Christians. It is not to be sought by outward unanimity, nor by aggregation in external communities. The Apostle's great thought is made small and the truth of it is falsified when it is over-hastily embodied in institutions. It has been sought in a uniformity which resembles unity as much as a bundle of faggots, all cut to the same length, and tied together with a rope, resemble the tree from which they were chopped, waving in the wind and living one life to the tips of its furthest branches. Men have made out of the Apostle's divine vision of a unity in the faith and knowledge of the Son of God 'a staunch and solid piece of framework as any January could freeze together,' and few things have stood more in the way of the realisation of his glowing anticipations than the formation of the great Corporation, imposing from its bulk and antiquity, to part from which was branded as breaking the unity of the spirit.

Paul gives no clear definition here of the time when the one body of Christian believers should have attained to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God, and the question may not have presented itself to him. It may appear that in view of the immediate context he regards the goal as one to be reached in our present life, or it may be that he is thinking rather of the Future, when the Master 'should bring together every joint and member and mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection.' But the time at which this great ideal should be attained is altogether apart from the obligation pressing upon us all, at all times, to work towards it. Whensoever it is reached it will only be by our drawing 'nearer, day by day, each to his brethren, all to God,' or rather, each to God and so all to his brethren. Take twenty points in a great circle and let each be advanced by one half of its distance to the centre, how much nearer will each be to each? Christ is our unity, not dogmas, not polities, not rituals: our oneness is a oneness of life. We need for our centre no tower with a top reaching to heaven, we have a living Lord who is with us, and in Him, we being many, are one.

II. Oneness in faith and knowledge knits all into a 'perfect man.'

'Perfect,' the Apostle here uses in opposition to the immediately following expression in the next verse, of 'children.' It therefore means not so much moral perfection as maturity or fulness of growth. So long as we fall short of the state of unity we are in the stage of immaturity. When we come to be one in faith and knowledge we have reached full-grown manhood. The existence of differences belongs to the infancy and boyhood of the Church, and as we grow one we are putting away childish things. What a contrast there is between Paul's vision here and the tendency which has been too common among Christians to magnify their differences, and to regard their obstinate adherence to these as being 'steadfastness in the faith'! How different would be the relations between the various communities into which the one body has been severed, if they all fully believed that their respective shibboleths were signs that they had not yet attained, neither were already perfect! When we began to be ashamed of these instead of glorying in them we should be beginning to grow into the maturity of our Christian life.

But the Apostle speaks of 'a perfect man' in the singular and not of 'men' in the plural, as he has already described the result of the union of Jew and Gentile as being the making 'of twain one new man.' This remarkable expression sets forth, in the strongest terms, the vital unity which connects all members of the one body so closely that there is but one life in them all. There are many members, but one body. Their functions differ, but the life in them all is identical. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of thee,' nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' Each is necessary to the completeness of the whole, and all are necessary to make up the one body of Christ. It is His life which manifests itself in every member and which gives clearness of vision to the eye, strength and deftness to the hand. He needs us all for His work on the world and for His revelation to the world of the fulness of His life. In some parts of England there are bell-ringers who stand at a table on which are set bells, each tuned to one note, and they can perform most elaborate pieces of music by swiftly catching up and sounding each of these in the right place. All Christian souls are needed for the Master's hand to bring out the note of each in its place. In the lowest forms of life all vital functions are performed by one simple sac, and the higher the creature is in the scale the more are its organs differentiated. In the highest form of all, 'as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ.'

III. This perfect manhood is the possession of all who are in Christ.

The fulness of Christ is the fulness which belongs to Him, or that of which He is full. All which He is and has is to be poured into His servants, and when all this is communicated to them the goal will be reached. We shall be full-grown men, and more wonderful still, we all shall make one perfect man, and individual completenesses will blend into that which is more complete than any of these, the one body, which corresponds to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This is the goal of humanity in which, and in which alone, the dreams of thinkers about perfectibility will become facts, and the longings that are deeply rooted in every soul will find their fulfilment.

By our personal union with Jesus Christ through faith, our individual perfection, both in the sense of maturity and in that of the realisation of ideal manhood, is assured, and in Him the race, as well as the individual, is redeemed, and will one day be glorified. The Utopias of many thinkers are but partial and distorted copies of the kingdom of Christ. The reality which He brings and imparts is greater than all these, and when the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven, and is planted on the common earth, it will outvie in lustre and outlast in permanence all forms of human association. The city of wisdom which was Athens, the city of power which was Rome, the city of commerce which is London, the city of pleasure which is Paris, 'pale their ineffectual fires' before the city in the light whereof the nations should walk.

The beginning of the process, of which the end is this inconceivable participation in the glory of Jesus, is simple trust in Him. 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit,' and he who trusts in Him, loves Him, and obeys Him, is joined to Him, and thereby is started on a course which never halts nor stays so long as the faith which started him abides, till he 'grows up into Him in all things which is the head, even Christ.' The experience of the Christian life as God means it to be, and by the communication of His grace makes it possible for it to become, is like that of men embarked on some sun-lit ocean, sailing past shining headlands, and ever onwards, over the boundless blue, beneath a calm sky and happy stars. The blissful voyagers are in full possession at every moment of all which they need and of all of His fulness which they can contain, but the full possession at every moment increases as they, by it, become capable of fuller possession. Increasing capacity brings with it increasing participation in the boundless fulness of Him who filleth all in all.

CHRIST OUR LESSON AND OUR TEACHER

'But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught in Him.'—EPH. iv. 20, 21.

THE Apostle has been describing in very severe terms the godlessness and corruption of heathenism. He reckons on the assent of the Ephesian Christians when he paints the society in which they lived as alienated from God, insensible to the restraints of conscience, and foul with all uncleanness. That was a picture of heathenism drawn from the life and submitted to the judgment of those who knew the original only too well. It has been reserved for modern eulogists to regard such statements as exaggerations. Those who knew heathenism from the inside knew that they were sober truth. The colonnades of the stately temple of Ephesus stank with proofs of their correctness.

Out of that mass of moral putridity these Ephesian Christians had been dragged. But its effects still lingered in them, and it was all about them with its pestilential miasma. So the first thing that they needed was to be guarded against it. The Apostle, in the subsequent context, with great earnestness gives a series of moral injunctions of the most elementary kind. Their very simplicity is eloquent. What sort of people must they have formerly been who needed to be bade not to steal and not to lie?

But before he comes to the specific duties, he lays down the broad general principle of which all these are to be but manifestations—viz. that they and we need, as the foundation of all noble conduct and of all theoretical ethics, the suppression and crucifixion of the old self and the investiture with a new self. And this double necessity, says the Apostle in my text, is the plain teaching of Jesus Christ to all His disciples.

Now the words which I have selected as my text are but a fragment of a closely concatenated whole, but I may deal with them separately at this time. They are very remarkable. They lay, as it seems to me, the basis for all Christian conduct; and they teach us how there is no real knowledge of Jesus Christ which does not effloresce into the practice of these virtues and graces which the Apostle goes on to describe.

I. First, Christ our Lesson and Christ our Teacher.

Mark the singular expression with which this text begins. 'Ye have not so learned *Christ*.' Now, we generally talk about learning a subject, a language, a science, or an art; but we do not talk about learning people. But Paul says we are Christ's disciples, not only in the sense that we learn of Him as Teacher—which follows in the next clause—but that we learn Him as the theme of our study.

That is to say, the relation of the person of Jesus Christ to all that He has to teach and reveal to the world is altogether different from that of all other teachers of all sorts of truth, to the truth which they proclaim. You can accept the truths and dismiss into oblivion the men from whom you got them. But you cannot reject Christ and take Christianity. The two are inseparably united. For, in regard to all spiritual and to all moral truth—truth about conduct and character—Jesus Christ *is* what He teaches. So we may say, turning well-known words of a poet in another direction: 'My lesson is in Thee.'

But that is not all. My text goes on to speak about another thing: 'Ye have learned Christ if so be that ye have *heard Him* and been taught.' Now that 'If so be' is not the 'if' of uncertainty or doubt, but it is equivalent to 'if, as I know to be the case,' or '*since* ye have heard Him.' Away there in Ephesus, years and years after the crucifixion, these people who had never seen Christ in the flesh, nor heard a word from the lips 'into which grace was poured,' are yet addressed by the Apostle as those who had listened to Him and heard Him speak. They had 'heard Him and been taught.' So He was Lesson and He was Teacher. And that is as true about us as it was about them. Let me say only a word or two about each of these two thoughts.

I have already suggested that the underlying truth which warrants the first of them is that Jesus Christ's relation to His message and revelation is altogether different from that of other teachers to what they have to communicate to the world. Of course we all know that, in regard to the wider sphere of religious and Christian truth, it is not only what Christ said, but even more what He did and was, that makes His revelation of the Father's heart. Precious as are the words which drop from His lips, which are spirit and are life, His life itself is more than all His teachings; and it is when we learn, not *from* Him, but when we learn *Him*, that we see the Father. But my text has solely reference to conduct, and in that aspect it just implies this thought, that the sum of all duty, the height of all moral perfectness, the realised ideal of humanity, is in Christ, and that the true way to know what a man or a nation ought to do is to study Him.

How strange it is, when one comes to consider it, that the impression of absolute perfection, free from all limitations of race or country or epoch or individual character—and yet not a vague abstraction but a true living Person—has been printed upon the minds and hearts of the world by these four little pamphlets which we call gospels! I do not think that there is anything in the whole history of literature to compare with the impression of veracity and historical reality and individual personality which is made by these fragmentary narratives. And although it has nothing to do with my present subject, I may just say in a sentence that it seems to me that the character of Jesus Christ as painted in the Gospels, in its incomparable vividness and vitality, is one of the strongest evidences for the simple faithfulness as biographies, of these books. Nothing else but the Man seen could have resulted in such compositions.

But apart altogether from that, how blessed it is that we have not to enter upon any lengthened investigations, far beyond the power of average minds, in order to get hold of the fundamental laws of moral conduct! How blessed it is that all the harshness of 'Obey this law or die' is by His life changed into 'Look at Me, and, for My love's sake, study Me and be like Me!' This is the blessed peculiarity which gives all its power and distinctive characteristic to the morality of the Gospel, that law is changed from a statuesque white ideal, pure as marble and cold and lifeless as it, into a living Person with a throbbing heart of love, and an outstretched hand of help, whose word is, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments, and be like Me.'

Christian men and women! study Jesus Christ. That is the Alpha and Omega of all right knowledge of duty and of all right practice of it. Learn Him, His self-suppression, His self-command, His untroubled calmness, His immovable patience, His continual gentleness, His constant reference of all things to the Father's will. Study these. To imitate Him is blessedness; to resemble Him is perfection. 'Ye have learned Christ' if you are Christians at all. You have at least begun the alphabet, but oh! in Him 'are hid all the treasures,' not only 'of wisdom and knowledge,' but of 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report'; and 'if there is any virtue, and if there is any praise,' we shall find them in Him who is our Lesson, our perfect Lesson.

But that is not all. Lessons are very well, but—dear me!—the world wants something besides lessons. It has had plenty of teaching. The trouble is not that we are not instructed, but that we do not take the lessons that are laid before us. And so my text suggests another thing besides the wholly inadequate conception, as it would be if it stood alone, of a mere exhibition of what we ought to be.

'If so be that ye have *heard* Him.' As I said, these Ephesian Christians, far away in Asia Minor, with seas and years between them and the plains of Galilee and the Cross of Calvary, are yet regarded by the Apostle as having listened to Jesus Christ. We, far away down the ages, and in another corner of the world, as really, without metaphor, in plain fact, may have Jesus Christ speaking to us, and may hear His voice. These Ephesians had heard Him, not only because they had heard about Him, nor because they had heard Him speaking through His servant Paul and others, but because, as Paul believed, that Lord, who had spoken with human lips words which it was possible for a man to utter when He was here on earth, when caught up into the third heaven was still speaking to men, even according to His own promise, which He gave at the very close of His career, 'I have declared Thy name unto My brethren, and *will* declare it.' So, though 'He began both to do and to teach' before He was taken up, after His Ascension He continues both the doing and the tuition. And, in verity, we all may hear His voice speaking in the depths of our hearts; speaking through the renewed conscience; speaking by that Spirit who will guide us into all the truth that we need; speaking through the ages to all who will listen to His voice.

The conception of Christ as a Teacher, which is held by many who deny His redeeming work and dismiss as incredible His divinity, seems to me altogether inadequate, unless it be supplemented by the belief that He now has and exercises the power of communicating wisdom and knowledge and warning and stimulus to waiting hearts; and that when we hear within the depth of our souls the voice saying to us, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' or saying to us, 'Pass not by, enter not into it,' if we have waited for Him, and studied His example and character, and sought, not to please ourselves, but to be led by His wisdom, we may be sure that it is Christ Himself who speaks. Reverence the inward monitor, and when He within thy heart, by His Spirit, calls thee, do thou answer, 'Speak, Lord! Thy servant heareth.' 'Ye have learned Christ if so be that ye have hearkened to Him.'

II. Secondly, mark the condition of learning the Lesson and hearing the Teacher.

Our Authorised Version, in accordance with its very frequent practice, has evacuated the last words of my text of their true force by the substitution of the more intelligible '*by* Him' for what the Apostle writes—'*in* Him.' The true rendering gives us the condition on which we learn our Lesson and hear our Teacher. '*In* Him' is no mere surplusage, and is not to be weakened down, as this translation of ours does, into a mere '*by* Him,' but it declares that, unless we keep ourselves in union with Jesus Christ, His voice will not be heard in our hearts, and the lesson will pass unlearned.

You know, dear brother, how emphatically and continually in the New Testament this doctrine of the dwelling of the believing soul in Christ, and the reciprocal dwelling of Christ in the believing soul, is insisted upon. And I, for my part, believe that one great cause of the unsatisfactory condition of the average Christianity of this day is the slurring over and minimising of these twin great and solemn truths. I would fain bring you back to the Master's words, as declaring the deepest truths in relation to the connection between the believing soul and the Christ in whom it believes:—'Abide in Me, and I in you.' I wish you would go home and take this Epistle to the Ephesians and read it over, putting a pencil mark below each place in which occurs the words 'in Christ Jesus.' I think you would learn something if you would do it.

But all that I have to say at present is that, if we would keep ourselves, by faith, by love, by meditation, by aspiration, by the submission of the will, and by practical obedience, in Jesus Christ, enclosed in Him as it were—then, and then only, should we learn His lesson, and then, and then only, should we hear Him speak. Why! if you never think about Him, how can you learn Him? If you seldom, or sleepily take up your Bibles and read the Gospels, of what good is His example to you? If you wander away into all manner of regions of thought and enjoyment instead of keeping near to Him, how can you expect that He will communicate Himself to you? If we keep ourselves in touch with that Lord, if we bring all our actions to Him, and measure our conduct by His pattern, then we shall learn His lesson. What does a student in a school of design do? He puts his feeble copy of some great picture beside the original, and compares it touch for touch, line for line, shade for shade, and so corrects its errors. Take your lives to the Exemplar in that fashion, and go over them bit by bit. Is *this* like Jesus Christ; is *that* what He would have done? Then '*in* Him,' thus in contact with Him, thus correcting our daubs by the perfect picture, we shall learn our lesson and listen to our Teacher.

Still your passions, muzzle your inclinations, clap a bridle on your will, and, as some tumultuous crowd would be hushed into silence that they might listen to the king speaking to them, make a great silence in your hearts, and you will 'hear Him' and be taught 'in Him.'

III. Lastly, the test and result of having learned the Lesson and listened to the Teacher is unlikeness to surrounding corruption.

'Ye have *not so* learned Christ.' Of course the hideous immoralities of Ephesus are largely, but by no means altogether, gone from Manchester. Of course, nineteen centuries of Christianity have to a very large extent changed the tone of society and influenced the moral judgments and practices even of persons who are not Christians. But there still remains a *world*, and there still remains unfilled up the gulf between the worldly and the godly life. And I believe it is just as needful as ever it was, though in different ways, for Christians to exhibit unlikeness to the world. 'Not so,' must be our motto; or, as the Jewish patriot said, 'So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord.'

I do not wish you to make yourselves singular; I do not wish you to wear conventional badges of unlikeness to certain selected evil habits. A Christian man's unlikeness to the world consists a great deal more in doing or being what it does not do and is not than in not doing or being what it does and is. It is easy to abstain from conventional things; it is a great deal harder to put in practice the unworldly virtues of the Christian character.

There are wide regions of life in which all men must act alike, be they saints or sinners, be they believers, Agnostics, Mohammedans, Turks, Jews, or anything else. There are two ways of doing the same thing. If two women were sitting at a grindstone, one of them a Christian and the other not, the one that pushed her handle half round the circle for Christ's sake would do it in a different fashion from the other one who took it from her hand and brought it round to the other side of the stone, and did it without reference to God.

Brethren, be sure of this, that if you and I do not find in ourselves the impulse to abstain from coarse enjoyments, to put our feet upon passions and desires, appetites and aims, which godless men recognise and obey without qualm or restraint, we need to ask ourselves: 'In what sense am I a Christian, or in what sense have I heard Christ?' It is a poor affair to fling away our faithful protest against the world's evils for the sake of receiving the world's smile. Modern Christianity is often not vital enough to be hated by a godless world; and it is not hated because it only deserves to be scorned. Keep near Jesus Christ, live in the light of His face, drink in the inspiration and instruction of His example, and the unlikeness will come, and no mistake. Dwell near Him, keep in Him, and the likeness will come, as it always comes to lovers, who grow to resemble that or those whom they love. 'It is enough for the disciple to be as his Teacher, and for the slave to be like his Lord.'

A DARK PICTURE AND A BRIGHT HOPE

'That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.'—EPH. iv. 22.

IF a doctor knows that he can cure a disease he can afford to give full weight to its gravest symptoms. If he knows he cannot he is sorely tempted to say it is of slight importance, and, though it cannot be cured, can be endured without much discomfort.

And so the Scripture teachings about man's real moral condition are characterised by two peculiarities which, at first sight, seem somewhat opposed, but are really harmonious and closely connected. There is no book and no system in the whole world that takes such a dark view of what you and I are; there is none animated with so bright and confident a hope of what you and I may become. And, on the other hand, the common run of thought amongst men minimises the fact of sin, but when you say, 'Well, be it big or little, can I get rid of it anyhow?' there is no answer to give that is worth listening to. Christ alone can venture to tell men what they are, because Christ alone can radically change their whole nature and being. There are certain diseases of which a constant symptom is unconsciousness that there is anything the matter. A deep-seated wound does not hurt much. The question is not whether Christian thoughts about a man's condition are gloomy or not, but whether they are true. As to their being gloomy, it seems to me that the people who complain of our doctrine of human nature, as giving a melancholy view of men, do really take a far more melancholy one. We believe in a fall, and we believe in a possible and actual restoration. The man to whom evil is not an intrusive usurper can have no confidence that it will ever be expelled. Which is the gloomy system—that which paints in undisguised blackness the facts of life, and over against their blackest darkness, the radiant light of a great hope shining bright and glorious, or one that paints humanity in a uniform monotone of indistinguishable grey involving the past, the present, and the future—which, believing in no disease, hopes for no cure? My text, taken in conjunction with the grand words which follow, about 'The new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness,' brings before us some very solemn views (which the men that want them most realise the least) with regard to what we are, what we ought to be and cannot be, and what, by God's help, we may become. The old man is 'corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,' says Paul. *There* are a set of characteristics, then, of the universal sinful human self. Then there comes a hopeless commandment—a mockery—if we are to stop with it, 'put it off.' And then there dawns on us the blessed hope and possibility of the fulfilment of the injunction, when we learn that 'the truth in Jesus' is, that we put off the old man with his deeds. Such is a general outline of the few thoughts I have to suggest to you.

I. I wish to fix, first of all, upon the very significant, though brief, outline sketch of the facts of universal sinful human nature which the Apostle gives here.

These are three, upon which I dilate for a moment or two. 'The old man' is a Pauline expression, about which I need only say here that we may take it as meaning that form of character and life which is common to us all, apart from the great change operated through faith in Jesus Christ. It is universal, it is sinful. There is a very remarkable contrast, which you will notice, between the verse upon which I am now commenting and the following one. The old man is set over against the new. One is created, the other is corrupted, as the word might be properly rendered. The one is created after God, the other is rotting to pieces under the influence of its lusts. The one consists of righteousness and holiness, which have their root in truth; the other is under the dominion of passions and desires, which, in themselves evil, are the instruments of and are characterised by deceit.

The first of the characteristics, then, of this sinful self, to which I wish to point for a moment is, that every Christless life, whatsoever the superficial differences in it, is really a life shaped according to and under the influence of *passionate desires.* You see I venture to alter one word of my text, and that for this simple reason; the word 'lusts' has, in modern English, assumed a very much narrower signification than either that of the original has, or than itself had in English when this translation was made. It is a very remarkable testimony, by the by, to the weak point in the bulk of men—to the side of their nature which is most exposed to assaults—that this word, which originally meant strong desire of any kind, should, by the observation of the desires that are strongest in the mass of people, have come to be restricted and confined to the one specific meaning of strong animal, fleshly, sensuous desires. It may point a lesson to some of my congregation, and especially to the younger portion of the men in it. Remember, my brother, that the part of your nature which is closest to the material is likewise closest to the animal, and is least under dominion (without a strong and constant effort) of the power which will save the flesh from corruption, and make the material the vehicle of the spiritual and divine. Many a young man comes into Manchester with the atmosphere of a mother's prayers and a father's teaching round about him; with holy thoughts and good resolutions beginning to sway his heart and spirit; and flaunting profligacy and seducing tongues beside him in the counting-house, in the warehouse, and at the shop counter, lead him away into excesses that banish all these, and, after a year or two of riot and sowing to the flesh, he 'of the flesh reaps corruption,' and that very literally—in sunken eye, and trembling hand, and hacking cough, and a grave opened for him before his time. Ah, my dear young friends! 'they promise them liberty.' It is a fine thing to get out of your father's house, and away from the restrictions of the society where you are known, and loving eyes—or unloving ones—are watching you. It is a fine thing to get into the freedom and irresponsibility of a big city! 'They promise them liberty,' and 'they themselves become the bond slaves of corruption.'

But, then, that is only the grossest and the lowest form of the truth that is here. Paul's indictment against us is not anything so exaggerated and extreme as that the animal nature predominates in all who are not Christ's. That is not true, and is not what my text says. But what it says is just this: that, given the immense varieties of tastes and likings and desires which men have, the point and characteristic feature of every godless life is that, be these what they may, they become the dominant power in that life. Paul does not, of course, deny that the sway and tyranny of such lusts and desires are sometimes broken by remonstrances of conscience; sometimes suppressed by considerations of prudence; sometimes by habit, by business, by circumstances that force people into channels into which they would not naturally let their lives run. He does not deny that often and often in such a life there will be a dim desire for something better—that high above the black and tumbling ocean of that life of corruption and disorder, there lies a calm heaven with great stars of duty shining in it. He does not deny that men are a law to themselves, as well as a bundle of desires which they obey; but what he charges upon us, and what I venture to bring as an indictment against you, and myself too, is this: that apart from Christ it is not conscience that rules our lives; that apart from Christ it is not sense of duty that is strongest; that apart from Christ the real directing impulse to which the inward proclivities, if not the outward activities, do yield in the main and on the whole, is, as this text says, the things that we like, the passionate desires of nature, the sensuous and godless heart.

And you say, 'Well, if it is so, what harm is it? Did not God make me with these desires, and am not I meant to gratify them?' Yes, certainly. The harm of it is, first of all, this, that it is an inversion of the true order. The passionate desires about which I am speaking, be they for money, be they for fame, or be they for any other of the gilded baits of worldly joys—these passionate dislikes and likings, as well as the purely animal ones—the longing for food, for drink, for any other physical gratification—these were never meant to be men's guides. They are meant to be impulses. They have motive power, but no directing power. Do you start engines out of a railway station without drivers or rails to run upon? It would be as reasonable as that course of life which men pursue who say, 'Thus I wish; thus I command; let my desire stand in the place of other argumentation and reason.' They take that part of their nature that is meant to be under the guidance of reason and conscience looking up to God, and put it in the supreme place, and so, setting a beggar on horseback, ride where we know such equestrians are said in the end to go! The desires are meant to be impelling powers. It is absurdity and the destruction of true manhood to make them, as we so often do, directing powers, and to put the reins into their hand. They are the wind, not the helm; the steam, not the driver. Let us keep things in their right places. Remember that the constitution of human nature, as God has meant it, is this: down there, under hatches, under control, the strong impulses; above them, the enlightened understanding; above that, the conscience, which has a loftier region than that of thought to move in, the moral region; and above that, the God, whose face, shining down upon the apex of the nature thus constituted, irradiates it with light which filters through all the darkness, down to the very base of the being; and sanctifies the animal, and subdues the impulses, and enlightens the understanding, and calms and quickens the conscience, and makes ductile and pliable the will, and fills the heart with fruition and tranquillity, and orders the life after the image of Him that created it.

I cannot dwell any longer on this first point; but I hope that I have said enough, not to show that the words are true—that is a very poor thing to do, if that were all that I aimed at—but to bring them home to some of our hearts and consciences. I pray God to impress the conviction that, although there be in us all the voice of conscience, which all of us more or less have tried at intervals to follow; yet in the main it abides for ever true—and it is true, my dear brethren, about you—a Christless life is a life under the dominion of tyrannous desires. Ask yourself what I cannot ask for you, Is it I? My hand fumbles about the hinges and handle of the door of the heart. You yourself must open it and let conviction come in!

Still further, the words before us add another touch to this picture. They not only represent the various passionate desires as being the real guides of 'the old man,' but they give this other characteristic—that these desires are in their very nature the instruments of deceit and lies.

The words of my text are, perhaps, rather enfeebled by the form of rendering which our translators have here, as in many cases, thought proper to adopt. If, instead of reading 'corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,' we read 'corrupt according to the desires of deceit,' we should have got not only the contrast between the old man and the new man, 'created in righteousness and holiness of truth'—but we should have had, perhaps, a clearer notion of the characteristic of these lusts, which the Apostle meant to bring into prominence. These desires are, as it were, the tools and instruments by which deceit betrays and mocks men, the weapons used by illusions and lies to corrupt and mar the soul. They are strong, and their nature is to pursue after their objects without regard to any consequences beyond their own gratification; but, strong as they are, they are like the blinded Samson, and will pull the house down on themselves if they be not watched. Their strength is excited on false pretences. They are stirred to grasp what is after all a lie. They are 'desires of deceit.'

That just points to the truth of all such life being hollow and profitless. If regard be had to the whole scope of our nature and necessities, and to the true aim of life as deduced therefrom, nothing is more certain than that no man will get the satisfaction that his ruling passions promise him, by indulging them. It is very sure that the way never to get what you need and desire is always to do what you like.

And that for very plain reasons. Because, for one thing, the object only satisfies for a time. Yesterday's food appeased our hunger for the day, but we wake hungry again. And the desires which are not so purely animal have the same characteristic of being stilled for the moment, and of waking more ravenous than ever. 'He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again.' Because, further, the desire grows and the object of it does not. The fierce longing increases, and, of course, the power of the thing that we pursue to satisfy it decreases in the same proportion. It is a fixed quantity; the appetite is indefinitely expansible. And so, the longer I go on feeding my desire, the more I long for the food; and the more I long for it, the less taste it has when I get it. It must be more strongly spiced to titillate a jaded palate. And there soon comes to be an end of the possibilities in that direction. A man scarcely tastes his brandy, and has little pleasure in drinking it, but he cannot do without it, and so he gulps it down in bigger and bigger draughts till delirium tremens comes in to finish all. Because, for another thing, after all, these desires are each but a fragment of one's whole nature, and when one is satisfied another is baying to be fed. The grim brute, like the watchdog of the old mythology, has three heads, and each gaping for honey cakes. And if they were all gorged, there are other longings in men's nature that will not let them rest, and for which all the leeks and onions of Egypt are not food. So long as these are unmet, you 'spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not.'

So we may lay it down as a universal truth, that whoever takes it for his law to do as he likes will not for long like what he does; or, as George Herbert says,

> 'Shadows well mounted, dreams in a career,
> Embroider'd lies, nothing between two dishes—
> These are the pleasures here.'

Do any of you remember the mournful words with which one of our greatest modern writers of fiction closes his saddest, truest book: 'Ah! *vanitas vanitatum!* Which of us is happy in this world? which of us has his desire? or, having it, is satisfied?' No wonder that with such a view of human life as that the next and last sentence should be, 'Come, children, let us shut up the box and the puppets, for the play is played out.' Yes! if there be nothing more to follow than the desires which deceive, man's life, with all its bustle and emotion, is a subject for cynical and yet sad regard, and all the men and women that toil and fret are 'merely players.'

Then, again, one more point in this portraiture of 'the old man,' is that *these deceiving desires corrupt.* The language of our text conveys a delicate shade of meaning which is somewhat blurred in our version. Properly, it speaks of 'the old man which is *growing* corrupt,' rather than 'which is corrupt,' and expresses the steady advance of that inward process of decay and deterioration which is ever the fate of a life subordinated to these desires. And this growing evil, or rather inward eating corruption which disintegrates and destroys a soul, is contrasted in the subsequent verse with the 'new man which is *created* in righteousness.' There is in the one the working of life, in the other the working of death. The one is formed and fashioned by the loving hands and quickening breath of God; the other is gradually and surely rotting away by the eating leprosy of sin. For the former the end is eternal life; for the latter, the second death.

And the truth that underlies that awful representation is the familiar one to which I have already referred in another connection, that, by the very laws of our nature, by the plain necessities of the case, all our moral qualities, be they good or bad, tend to increase by exercise. In whatever direction we move, the rate of progress tends to accelerate itself. And this is pre-eminently the case when the motion is downwards. Every day that a bad man lives he is a worse man. My friend! you are on a sloping descent. Imperceptibly—because you will not look at the landmarks—but really, and not so very slowly either; convictions are dying out, impulses to good are becoming feeble, habits of neglect of conscience are becoming fixed, special forms of sin—avarice, or pride, or lust—are striking their claws deeper into your soul, and holding their bleeding booty firmer. In all regions of life exercise strengthens capacity. The wrestler, according to the old Greek parable, who began by carrying a calf on his shoulders, got to carry an ox by and by.

It is a solemn thought this of the steady continuous aggravation of sin in the individual character. Surely nothing can be small which goes to make up that rapidly growing total. Beware of the little beginnings which 'eat as doth a canker.' Beware of the slightest deflection from the straight line of right. If there be two lines, one straight and the other going off at the sharpest angle, you have only to produce both far enough, and there will be room between them for all the space that separates hell from heaven! Beware of lading your souls with the weight of small single sins. We heap upon ourselves, by slow, steady accretion through a lifetime, the weight that, though it is gathered by grains, crushes the soul. There is nothing heavier than sand. You may lift it by particles. It drifts in atoms, but heaped upon a man it will break his bones, and blown over the land it buries pyramid and sphynx, the temples of gods and the homes of men beneath its barren solid waves. The leprosy gnaws the flesh off a man's bones, and joints and limbs drop off—he is a living death. So with every soul that is under the dominion of these lying desires—it is slowly rotting away piecemeal, 'waxing corrupt according to the lusts of deceit.'

II. Note how, this being so, we have here the hopeless command to put off the old man.

That command 'put it off' is the plain dictate of conscience and of common sense. But it seems as hopeless as it is imperative. I suppose everybody feels sometimes, more or less distinctly, that they ought to make an effort and get rid of these beggarly usurpers that tyrannise over will, and conscience, and life. Attempts enough are made to shake off the yoke. We have all tried some time or other. Our days are full of foiled resolutions, attempts that have broken down, unsuccessful rebellions, ending like the struggles of some snared wild creature, in wrapping the meshes tighter round us. How many times, since you were a boy or a girl, have you said—'Now I am *determined* that I will never do that again. I have flung away opportunities. I have played the fool and erred exceedingly—but I now turn over a new leaf!' Yes, and you have turned it—and, if I might go on with the metaphor, the first gust of passion or temptation has blown the leaf back again, and the old page has been spread before you once more just as it used to be. The history of individual souls and the tragedy of the world's history recurring in every age, in which the noblest beginnings lead to disastrous ends, and each new star of promise that rises on the horizon leads men into quagmires and sets in blood, sufficiently show how futile the attempt in our own strength to overcome and expel the evils that are rooted in our nature.

Moralists may preach, 'Unless above himself he can erect himself, how mean a thing is man'; but all the preaching in the world is of no avail. The task is an impossibility. The stream cannot rise above its source, nor be purified in its flow if bitter waters come from the fountain. 'Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?' There is no power in human nature to cast off this clinging self. As in the awful vision of the poet, the serpent is grown into the man. The will is feeble for good, the conscience sits like a discrowned king issuing empty mandates, while all his realm is up in rebellion and treats his proclamations as so much waste paper. How can a man re-make himself? how cast off his own nature? The means at his disposal themselves need to be cleansed, for themselves are tainted. It is the old story—who will keep the keepers?—who will heal the sick physicians? You will sometimes see a wounded animal licking its wounds with its own tongue. How much more hopeless still is our effort by our own power to stanch and heal the gashes which sin has made! 'Put off the old man'—yes—and if it but clung to the limbs like the hero's poisoned vest, it might be possible. But it is not a case of throwing aside clothing, it is stripping oneself of the very skin and flesh—and if there is nothing more to be said than such vain commonplaces of impossible duty, then we must needs abandon hope, and wear the rotting evil till we die.

But that is not all. 'What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh,' God sending His own Son did—He condemned sin in the flesh. So we come to

III. The possibility of fulfilling the command.

The context tells us how this is possible. The law, the pattern, and the power for complete victory over the old sinful self, are to be found, 'as the truth is—in Jesus.' Union with Christ gives us a real possession of a new principle of life, derived from Him, and like His own. That real, perfect, immortal life, which hath no kindred with evil, and flings off pollution and decay from its pure surface, will wrestle with and finally overcome the living death of obedience to the deceitful lusts. Our weakness will be made vigorous by His inbreathed power. Our gravitation to earth and sin will be overcome by the yearning of that life to its source. An all-constraining motive will be found in love to Him who has given Himself for us. A new hope will spring as to what may be possible for us, when we see Jesus, and in Him recognise the true Man, whose image we may bear. We shall die with Him to sin, when, resting by faith on Him who has died for sin, we are made conformable to His death, that we may walk in newness of life. Faith in Jesus gives us a share in the working of that mighty power by which He makes all things new. The renovation blots out the past, and changes the direction of the future. The fountain in our hearts sends forth bitter waters that cannot be healed. 'And the Lord showed him a tree,' even that Cross whereon Christ was crucified for us, 'which, when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.'

I remember a rough parable of Luther's, grafted on an older legend, on this matter, which runs somewhat in this fashion: A man's heart is like a foul stable. Wheelbarrows and shovels are of little use, except to remove some of the surface filth, and to litter all the passages in the process. What is to be done with it? 'Turn the Elbe into it,' says he. The flood will sweep away all the pollution. Not my own efforts, but the influx of that pardoning, cleansing grace which is in Christ will wash away the accumulations of years, and the ingrained evil which has stained every part of my being. We cannot cleanse ourselves, we cannot 'put off' this old nature which has struck its roots so deep into our being; but if we turn to Him with faith and say—Forgive me, and cleanse, and strip from me the foul and ragged robe fit only for the swine-troughs in the far-off land of disobedience, He will receive us and answer all our desires, and cast around us the pure garment of His own righteousness. 'The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus shall make us free from the law of sin and death.'

THE NEW MAN

'And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.'—EPH. iv. 24.

WE had occasion to remark in a former sermon that Paul regards this and the preceding clauses as the summing up of 'the truth in Jesus'; or, in other words, he considers the radical transformation and renovation of the whole moral nature as being the purpose of the revelation of God in Christ. To this end they have 'heard Him.' To this end they have 'learned Him.' To this end they have been 'taught in Him,' receiving, by union with Him, all the various processes of His patient discipline. This is the inmost meaning of all the lessons in that great school in which all Christians are scholars, and Christ is the teacher and the theme, and union to Him the condition of entrance, and the manifold workings of His providence and His grace the instruments of training, and heaven the home when school time is over—that we should become new men in Christ Jesus.

This great practical issue is set forth here under three aspects—one negative, two positive. The negative process is single and simple—'put off the old man.' The positive is double—a spiritual 'renewal' effected in our spirits, in the deep centre of our personal being, by that Divine Spirit who, dwelling in us, is 'the spirit of our minds'; and then, consequent upon that inward renewal, a renovation of life and character, which is described as being the 'putting on,' as if it were a garment, of 'the new man,' created by a divine act, and consisting in moral and spiritual likeness to God. It is not necessary to deal, except incidentally, with the two former, but I desire to consider the last of these—the putting on of the new man—a little more closely, and to try to bring out the wealth and depth of the Apostle's words in this wonderful text.

The ideas contained seem to me in brief to be these—the great purpose of the Gospel is our moral renewal; that moral renewal is a creation after God's image; that new creation has to be put on or appropriated by us; the great means of appropriating it is contact with God's truth. Let us consider these points in order.

I. The great purpose of the Gospel is our moral renewal; 'the new man . . . created in righteousness and . . . holiness.'

Now, of course, there are other ways of stating the end of the Gospel. This is by no means an exhaustive setting forth of its purpose. We may say that Christ has come in order that men may know God. We may say that He comes in order that the Divine Love, which ever delights to communicate, may bestow itself, and may conceive of the whole majestic series of acts of self-revelation from the beginning as being—if I may so say—for the gratification of that impulse to impart itself, which is the characteristic of love in God and man. We may say that the purpose of the whole is the deliverance of men from the burden and guilt of sin. But whether we speak of the end of the Gospel as the glory of God, or the blessedness of man, or as here, as being the moral perfection of the individual or of the race, they are all but various phrases of the one complete truth. The Gospel is the consequence and the manifestation of the love of God, which delights to be known and possessed by loving souls, and being known, changes them into its own likeness, which to know is to be happy, which to resemble is to be pure.

The first thing that strikes me about this representation of our text is the profound sense of human sinfulness which underlies it.

The language is utterly unmeaning—or at all events grossly exaggerated—unless all have sinned, and the nature which belongs to men universally, apart from the transforming power of Christ's Spirit, be corrupt and evil. And that it is so is the constant view of Scripture. The Bible notion of what men need in order to be pure and good is very different from the superficial notions of worldly moralists and philanthropists. We hear a great deal about 'culture,' as if all that were needed were the training and strengthening of the nature, as if what was mainly needed was the development of the understanding. We hear about 'reformation' from some who look rather deeper than the superficial apostles of culture. And how singularly the very word proclaims the insufficiency of the remedy which it suggests! 'Re-formation' affects form and not substance. It puts the old materials into a new shape. Exactly so—and much good may be expected from that! They are the old materials still, and it matters comparatively little how they are arranged. It is not re-formation, but re-novation, or, to go deeper still, re-generation, that the world needs; not new forms. but a new life; not the culture and development of what it has in itself, but extirpation of the old by the infusion of something new and pure that has no taint of corruption, nor any contact with evil. 'Verily, I say unto you, ye must be born again.'

All slighter notions of the need and more superficial diagnoses of the disease lead to a treatment with palliatives which never touch the true seat of the mischief. The poison flowers may be plucked, but the roots live on. It is useless to build dykes to keep out the wild waters. Somewhere or other they will find a way through. The only real cure is that which only the Creating hand can effect, who, by slow operation of some inward agency, can raise the level of the low lands, and lift them above the threatening waves. What is needed is a radical transformation, going down to the very roots of the being; and that necessity is clearly implied in the language of this text, which declares that a nature possessing righteousness and holiness is 'a new man' to be 'put on' as from without, not to be evolved as from within.

It is to be further noticed what the Apostle specifies as the elements, or characteristics of this new nature—righteousness and holiness.

The proclamation of a new nature in Christ Jesus, great and precious truth as it is, has often been connected with teaching which has been mystical in the bad sense of that word, and has been made the stalking horse of practical immorality. But here we have it distinctly defined in what that new nature consists. There is no vague mystery about it, no tampering with the idea of personality. The people who put on the new man are the same people after as before. The newness consists in moral and spiritual characteristics. And these are all summed up in the two—righteousness and holiness. To which is added in the substantially parallel passage in Colossians, 'Renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created Him,' where, I suppose, we must regard the 'knowledge' as meaning that personal knowledge and acquaintance which has its condition in love, and is the foundation of the more purely moral qualities of which our text speaks.

Is there, then, any distinction between these two? I think there is very obviously so. 'Righteousness' is, I suppose, to be understood here in its narrower meaning of observance of what is right, the squaring of conduct according to a solemn sovereign law of duty. Substantially it is equivalent to the somewhat heathenish word 'morality,' and refers human conduct and character to a law or standard. What, then, is 'holiness'? It is the same general conduct and character, considered, however, under another aspect, and in another relation. It involves the reference of life and self to God, consecration to, and service of Him. It is not a mere equivalent of purity, but distinctly carries the higher reference. The obedience now is not to a law but to a Lord. The perfection now does not consist in conformity to an ideal standard, but in likeness and devotion to God. That which I ought to do is that which my Father in heaven wills. Or, if the one word may roughly represent the more secular word 'morality,' the other may roughly represent the less devout phrase, 'practical religion.'

These are 'new,' as actually realised in human nature. Paul thinks that we shall not possess them except as a consequence of renovation. But they are not 'new' in the sense that the contents of Christian morality are different from the contents of the law written on men's hearts. The Gospel proclaims and produces no fantastic ethics of its own. The actions which it stamps in its mint are those which pass current in all lands—not a provincial coinage, but recognised as true in ring, and of full weight everywhere. Do not fancy that Christian righteousness is different from ordinary 'goodness,' except as being broader and deeper, more thorough-going, more imperative. Divergences there are, for our law is more than a republication of the law written on men's hearts. Though the one agrees with the other, yet the area which they cover is not the same. The precepts of the one, like some rock-hewn inscriptions by forgotten kings, are weathered and indistinct, often illegible, often misread, often neglected. The other is written in living characters in a perfect life. It includes all that the former attempts to enjoin, and much more besides. It alters the perspective, so to speak, of heathen morals, and brings into prominence graces overlooked or despised by them. It breathes a deeper meaning and a tenderer beauty into the words which express human conceptions of virtue, but it does take up these into itself. And instead of setting up a 'righteousness' which is peculiar to itself, and has nothing to do with the world's morality, Christianity says, as Christ has taught us, 'Except your righteousness *exceed* the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of God.' The same apostle who here declares that actual righteousness and holiness are new things on the earth, allows full force to whatsoever weight may be in the heathen notion of 'virtue,' and adopts the words and ideas which he found ready made to his hands, in that notion—as fitly describing the Christian graces which he enjoined. Grecian moralists supplied him with the names true, honest, just, and pure. His 'righteousness' accepted these as included within its scope. And we have to remember that we are not invested with that new nature, unless we are living in the exercise of these common and familiar graces which the consciences and hearts of all the world recognise for 'lovely' and 'of good report,' hail as 'virtue,' and crown with 'praise.'

So, then, let me pause here for a moment to urge you to take these thoughts as a very sharp and salutary test. You call yourselves Christian people. The purpose of your Christianity is your growth and perfecting in simple purity, and devotion to, and dependence on, our loving Father. Our religion is nothing unless it leads to these. Otherwise it is like a plant that never seeds, but may bear some feeble blossoms that drop shrunken to the ground before they mature. To very many of us the old solemn remonstrance should come with awakening force—'Ye did run well, what did hinder you?' You have apprehended Christ as the revealer and bringer of the great mercy of God, and have so been led in some measure to put your confidence in Him for your salvation and deliverance. But have you apprehended Him as the mould into which your life is to be poured, that life having been made fluent and plastic by the warmth of His love? You have apprehended Him as your refuge; have you apprehended Him as your inward sanctity? You have gone to Him as the source of salvation from the guilt and penalties of sin; have you gone to Him, and are you daily growing in the conscious possession of Him, as the means of salvation from the corruption and evil of sin? He comes to make us good. What has He made you? Anything different from what you were twenty years ago? Then, if not, and in so far as you are unchanged and unbettered, the Gospel is a failure for you, and you are untrue to it. The great purpose of all the work of Christ—His life, His sorrows, His passion, His resurrection, His glory, His continuous operation by the Spirit and the word—is to make new men who shall be just and devout, righteous and holy.

II. A second principle contained in these words, is that this moral Renewal is a Creation in the image of God.

The new man is 'created after the image of God'—that is, of course, according to or in the likeness of God. There is evident reference here to the account of man's creation in Genesis, and the idea is involved that this new man is the restoration and completion of that earlier likeness, which, in some sense, has faded out of the features and form of our sinful souls. It is to be remembered, however, that there is an image of God inseparable from human nature, and not effaceable by any obscuring or disturbance caused by sin. Man's likeness to God consists in his being a person, possessed of a will and self-consciousness, and that mysterious gift of personality abides whatever perishes. But beyond that natural image of God, as we may call it, there is something else which fades wholly with the first breath of evil, like the reflexion of the sky on some windless sea. The natural likeness remains, and without it no comparison would be possible. We should not think of saying that a stone or an eagle were unlike God. But while the personal being makes comparison fitting, what makes the true contrast? In what respect is man unlike God? In moral antagonism. What is the true likeness? Moral harmony. What separates men from their Father in heaven? Is it that His 'years are throughout all generations,' and 'my days are as an handbreadth'? Is it that His power is infinite, and mine all thwarted by other might and ever tending to weakness and extinction? Is it that His wisdom, sunlike, waxes not nor wanes, and there is nothing hid from its beams, while my knowledge, like the lesser light, shines by reflected radiance, serves but to make the night visible, and is crescent and decaying, changeful and wandering? No. All such distinctions based upon what people call the sovereign attributes of God—the distinctions of creator and created, infinite and finite, omnipotent and weak, eternal and transient—make no real gulf between God and man. If we have only to say, 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are' His 'ways higher than' our 'ways,' that difference is not unlikeness, and establishes no separation; for low and flat though the dull earth be, does not heaven bend down round it, and send rain and sun, dew and blessing? But it is because 'your ways are not *as* my ways'—because there is actual opposition, because the *directions* are different—that there is unlikeness. The image of God lies not only in that personality which the 'Father of Lies' too possesses, but in 'righteousness and holiness.'

But besides this reference to the original creation of man, there is another reason for the representation of the new nature as being a work of divine creative power. It is in order to give the most emphatic expression possible to the truth that we do not make our righteousness for ourselves, but receive it as from Him. The new man is not our work, it is God's creation. As at the beginning, the first human life is represented as not originated in the line of natural cause and effect, but as a new and supernatural commencement, so in every Christian soul the life which is derived from God, and will unfold itself in His likeness, comes from His own breath inbreathed into the nostrils. It too is out of the line of natural causes. It too is a direct gift from God. It too is a true supernatural being—a real and new creation.

May I venture a step further? 'The new man' is spoken of here as if it had existence ere we 'put it on.' I do not press that, as if it necessarily involved the idea which I am going to suggest, for the peculiar form of expression is probably only due to the exigencies of the metaphor. Still it may not be altogether foreign to the whole scope of the passage, if I remind you that the new man, the true likeness of God, has, indeed, a real existence apart from our assumption of it. Of course, the righteousness and holiness which make that new nature in me have no being till they become mine. But we believe that the righteousness and holiness which we make ours come from another, who bestows them on us. 'The new man' is not a mere ideal, but has a historical and a present existence. The ideal has lived and lives, is a human person, even Jesus Christ the express image of the Father, who is the beginning of the new creation, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness. That fair vision of a humanity detached from all consequences of sin, renewed in perfect beauty, stainless and Godlike, is no unsubstantial dream, but a simple fact. He ever liveth. His word to us is, 'I counsel thee to buy of me—white raiment.' And a full parallel to the words of our text, which bid us 'put on the new man, created after God in righteousness and holiness,' is found in the other words of the same Apostle—'Let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ.'

In accordance with this—

III. It is further to be noticed that this new creation has to be put on and appropriated by us.

The same idea which, as I have already remarked, is conveyed by the image of a new creation, is reiterated in this metaphor of putting on the new nature, as if it were a garment. Our task is not to weave it, but to wear it. It is made and ready.

And that process of assumption or putting on has two parts. We are clothed upon with Christ in a double way, or rather in a double sense. We are 'found in Him not having our own righteousness,' but invested with His for our pardon and acceptance. We are clothed with His righteousness for our purifying and sanctifying.

Both are the conditions of our being like God. Both are the gifts of God. The one, however, is an act; the other a process. Both are received. The one is received on condition of simple faith; the other is received by the medium of faithful effort. Both are included in the wide conception of salvation, but the law for the one is 'Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by His mercy He saved us'; and the law for the other is—'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.' Both come from Christ, but for the one we have the invitation, 'Buy of Me white raiment that thou mayest be clothed'; and for the other we have the command, 'Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh.' There is the assumption of His righteousness which makes a man a Christian, and has for its condition simple faith. There is the assumption of His righteousness sanctifying and transforming us which follows in a Christian course, as its indispensable accompaniment and characteristic, and that is realised by daily and continuous effort.

And one word about the manner, the effort as set forth here; twofold, as I have already pointed out—a negative and positive. We are not concerned here with the relations of these amongst themselves, but I may remark that there is no growth in holiness possible without the constant accompanying process of excision and crucifixion of the old. If you want to grow purer and liker Christ, you must slay yourselves. You cannot gird on 'righteousness' above the old self, as some beggar might buckle to himself royal velvet with its ermine over his filthy tatters. There must be a putting off in order to and accompanying the putting on. Strip yourselves of yourselves, and then you 'shall not be found naked,' but clothed with the garments of salvation, as the bride with the robe which is the token of the bridegroom's love, and the pledge of her espousals to him.

And let nobody wonder that the Apostle here commands us, as by our own efforts, to put on and make ours what is in many other places of Scripture treated as God's gift. These earnest exhortations are perfectly consistent with the belief that all comes from God. Our faithful adherence to our Lord and Master, our honest efforts in His strength to secure more and more of His likeness, determine the extent to which we shall possess that likeness. The new nature is God's gift, and it is given to us according to His own fulness indeed, but also according to the measure of our faith. Blessed be His name! we have nothing to do but to accept His gift. The garment with which He clothes our nakedness and hides our filth is woven in no earthly looms. As with the first sinful pair, so with all their children since, 'the Lord God made them' the covering which they cannot make for themselves. But we have to accept it, and we have by daily toil, all our lives long, to gather it more and more closely around us, to wrap ourselves more and more completely in its ample folds. We have by effort and longing, by self-abnegation and aspiration, by prayer and work, by communion and service, to increase our possession of that likeness to God which lives in Jesus Christ, and from Him is stamped ever more and more deeply on the heart. For the strengthening of our confidence and our gratitude, we have to remember with lowly trust that it is true of us, 'If any man be in Christ he is a new creature.' For the quickening of our energy and faithful efforts we have to give heed to the command, and fulfil it in ourselves—'Be ye renewed in the Spirit of your minds, and put on the new man.'

IV. And, finally, the text contains the principle that the means of appropriating this new nature is contact with the truth.

If you will look at the margins of some Bibles you will see that our translators have placed there a rendering, which, as is not unfrequently the case, is decidedly better than that adopted by them in the text. Instead of 'true holiness,' the literal rendering is 'holiness of truth'—and the Apostle's purpose in the expression is not to particularise the quality, but the origin of the 'holiness.' It is 'of truth,' that is, produced by the holiness which flows from the truth as it is in Jesus, of which he has been speaking a moment before.

And we come, therefore, to this practical conclusion, that whilst the agent of renovation is the Divine Spirit, and the condition of renovation is our cleaving to

Christ, the medium of renovation and the weapon which transforming grace employs is 'the word of the truth of the Gospel,' whereby we are sanctified. There we get the law, and there we get the motive and the impulse. There we get the encouragement and the hope. In it, in the grand simple message—'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,' lie the germs of all moral progress. And in proportion as we believe that—not with the cold belief of our understandings, but with the loving affiance of our hearts and our whole spiritual being—in proportion as we believe that, in that proportion shall we grow in 'knowledge,' shall we grow in 'righteousness,' in the 'image of Him that created us.' The Gospel is the great means of this change, because it is the great means by which He who works the change comes near to our understandings and our hearts.

So let us learn how impossible are righteousness and holiness, morality and religion in men, unless they flow from this source. It is the truth that sanctifies. It is the Spirit who wields that truth who sanctifies. It is Christ who sends the Spirit who sanctifies. But, brethren, beyond the range of this light is only darkness, and that nature which is not cleansed by His priestly hand laid upon it remains leprous, and he who is clothed with any other garment than His righteousness will find 'the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.' And let us learn, on the other hand, the incompleteness and monstrosity of a professed belief in 'the truth' which does not produce this righteousness and holiness. It may be real—God forbid that we should step into His place and assume His office of discerning the thoughts of the heart, and the genuineness of Christian professions! But, at any rate, it is no exaggeration nor presumption to say that a professed faith which is not making us daily better, gentler, simpler, purer, more truthful, more tender, more brave, more self-oblivious, more loving, more strong—more like Christ—is wofully deficient either in reality or in power—is, if genuine, ready to perish—if lit at all, smouldering to extinction. Christian men and women! is 'the truth' moulding you into Christ's likeness? If not, see to it whether it be the truth which you are holding, and whether you are holding the truth or have unconsciously let it slip from a grasp numbed by the freezing coldness of the world.

And for us all, let us see that we lay to heart the large truths of this text, and give them that personal bearing without which they are of no avail. *I* need renovation in my inmost nature. Nothing can renew *my* soul but the power of Christ, who is *my* life. *I* am naked and foul. Nothing can cleanse and clothe *me* but He. The blessed truth which reveals Him calls for *my* individual faith. And if *I* put *my* confidence in that Lord, He will dwell in *my* inmost spirit, and so sway *my* affections and mould *my* will that *I* shall be transformed unto His perfect likeness. He begins with each one of us by bringing the best robe to cast over the rags of the returning prodigal. He ends not with any who trust Him, until they stand amid the hosts of the heavens who follow Him, clothed with fine linen clean and white, which is the righteousness of His Holy ones.

GRIEVING THE SPIRIT

'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'—EPH. iv. 30.

THE miracle of Christianity is the Incarnation. It is not a link in a chain, but a new beginning, the entrance into the cosmic order of a Divine Power. The sequel of Bethlehem and Calvary and Olivet is the upper room and the Pentecost. There is the issue of the whole mission and work of Christ—the planting in the heart of humanity of a new and divine life. All Christendom is professing to commemorate that fact to-day,[1] but a large portion of us forget that it was but a transient sign of a perpetual reality. The rushing mighty wind has died down into a calm; the fiery tongues have ceased to flicker on the disciples' heads, but the miracle, which is permanent, and is being repeated from day to day, in the experience of every believing soul, is the inrush of the very breath of God into their lives, and the plunging of them into a fiery baptism which melts their coldness and refines away their dross. Now, my text brings before us some very remarkable thoughts as to the permanent working of the Divine Spirit upon Christian souls, and upon this it bases a very tender and persuasive exhortation to conduct. And I desire simply to try to bring out the fourfold aspect in these words. There is, first, a wondrous revelation; second, a plain lesson as to what that Divine Spirit chiefly does; third, a solemn warning as to man's power and freedom to thwart it; and, lastly, a tender motive for conduct. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

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[1] Preached on Whitsunday.

Now let us look briefly at these four thoughts: Here we have—

I. A wonderful revelation.

Wonderful to all, startling to some. If you can speak of grief, you must be speaking of a person. An influence cannot be sorry, whatever may happen to it. And that word of my text is no mere violent metaphor or exaggeratedly strong way of suggesting a motive, but it keeps rigidly within the New Testament limits, in reference to that Divine Spirit, when to Him it attributes this personal emotion of sorrow with its correlation of possible joy.

Now, I do not need to dwell upon the thought here, but I do desire to emphasise it, especially in view of the strangely hazy and defective conceptions which so many Christian people have upon this matter. And I desire to remind you that the implied assumption of a personal Spirit, capable of being 'grieved,' which is in this text, is in accordance with all the rest of the New Testament teaching.

What did Jesus Christ mean when He spoke of one who 'will guide you into all truth'; of one who 'whatsoever He shall hear, those things shall He speak'? What does the book of the Acts mean when it says that the Spirit said to the believers in Antioch, 'Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them'? What did Paul mean when he said, 'In every city the Holy Ghost testifieth that bonds and afflictions await me'? What does the minister officiating in baptism mean when he says, 'I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost'? That form presents, according to many interpretations, a Divine Person, a Man, and an Influence. Why are these bracketed together? And what do we mean when, at the end of every Christian service, we invoke 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit'? A Man, and God, and an Influence—is that the interpretation? You cannot get rid from the New Testament teaching, whether you accept it or not—you cannot eliminate from it this, that the divine causality of our salvation is threefold and one, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Now, brethren, I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that practically the average orthodox believer believes in a duality, and not a Trinity, in the divine nature. I do not care about the scholastic words, but what I would insist upon is that the course of Christian thinking has been roughly this. First of all, in the early Church, the question of the Divine nature came into play, mainly in reference to the relation of the Eternal Word to the Eternal Father, and of the Incarnation to both. And then, when that was roughly settled, there came down through many ages, and there still subsists, the endeavour to cast into complete and intelligible forms the doctrine, if I must use the word, of Christ's nature and work. And now, as I believe, to a very large extent, the foremost and best thinking of the Christian Church is being occupied with that last problem, the nature and work of that Divine Spirit. I believe that we stand on the verge of a far clearer perception of, and of a far more fervent and realising faith in, the Spirit of God, than ever the Churches have seen before. And I pray you to remember that however much your Christian thought and Christian faith may be centred upon, and may be drawing its nourishment and its joy from, the work of Jesus Christ who died on the Cross for our salvation, and lives to be our King and Defender, there is a gap—not only in your Christian Creed, but also in your Christian experiences and joys and power, unless you have risen to this thought, that the Divine Spirit is not only an influence, a wind, a fire, an oil, a dove, a dew, but a Divine Person. We have to go back to the old creed —'I believe in God the Father Almighty . . . and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord . . . I believe in the Holy Ghost.'

But further, this same revelation carries with it another, and to some of us a startling thought. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit': that Divine Person is capable of grief. I do not believe that is rhetorical exaggeration. Of course I know that we should think of God as the ever-blessed God, but we also in these last days begin to think more boldly, and I believe more truly, that if man is in the image of God, and there is a divine element in humanity, there must be a human element in divinity. And though I know that it is perilous to make affirmations about a matter so far beyond our possibility of verification by experience, I venture to think that perhaps the doctrine that God is lifted up high above all human weaknesses and emotions does not mean that there can be no shadow cast on the divine blessedness by the dark substance of human sin. I do not venture to assert: I only suggest; and this I know, that He who said to us, 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father,' had His eyes filled with tears, even in His hour of triumph, as He looked across the valley and saw the city sparkling in the rays of the morning sun. May we venture to see there an unveiling of the divine heart? Love has an infinite capacity of sorrow as of joy. But I leave these perhaps too presumptuous and lofty thoughts, to turn to the other points involved in the words before us.

I said, in the second place, there was—

II. A plain lesson here, as to the great purpose for which the Divine Spirit has been lodged in the heart of humanity.

I find that in the two words of my text, 'the Holy Spirit,' and 'ye were thereby sealed unto the day of redemption.' If the central characteristic which it imports us to know and to keep in mind is that implied by the name, 'the Holy Spirit,' then, of course, the great work that He has to perform upon earth is to make men like Himself. And that is further confirmed by the emblem of the seal which is here; for the seal comes in contact with the thing sealed, and leaves the impression of its own likeness there. And whatever else—and there is a great deal else that I cannot touch now—may be included in that great thought of the sealing by the Divine Spirit, these things are inseparably connected with, and suggested by it, viz. the actual contact of the Spirit of God with our spirits, which is expressed, as you may remember, in the other metaphors of being baptized in and anointed with, and yet more important, the result purposed by that contact being mainly to make us holy.

Now, I pray you to think of how different that is from all other notions of inspiration that the world has ever known, and how different it is from a great many ideas that have had influence within the Christian Church. People say there are not any miracles now, and say we are worse off than when there used to be. That Divine Spirit does not come to give gifts of healing, interpretations of tongues, and all the other abnormal and temporary results which attended the first manifestations. These, when they were given, were but means to an end, and the end subsists whilst the means are swept away. It is better to be made good than to be filled with all manner of miraculous power. 'In this rejoice, not that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.' All the rest is transient. It is gone; let it go, we are not a bit the poorer for want of it. This remains—not tongues, nor gifts of healing, nor any other of these miraculous and extraordinary and external powers—but the continual operation of a divine influence, moulding men into its own likeness.

Christianity is intensely ethical, and it sets forth, as the ultimate result of all its machinery, changing men into the likeness of God. Holiness is that for which Christ died, that for which the Divine Spirit works. Unless we Christian people recognise the true perspective of the Spirit's gifts, and put at the base the extraordinary, and higher than these, but still subordinate, the intellectual, and on top of all the spiritual and moral, we do not understand the meaning of the central gift and possible blessing of Christianity, to make us holy, or, if you do not like the theological word, let us put it into still plainer and more modern English, to make you and me good men and women, like God. That is the mightiest work of that Divine Spirit.

We have here—

III. A plain warning as to the possibility of thwarting these influences.

Nothing here about irresistible grace; nothing here about a power that lays hold upon a man, and makes him good, he lying passive in its hands like clay in the hands of the potter! You will not be made holy without the Divine Spirit, but you will not be made holy without your working along with it. There is a possibility of resisting, and there is a possibility of co-operating. Man is left free. God does not lay hold of any one by the hair of his head, and drag him into paths of righteousness whether he will or no. But whilst there is the necessity for co-operation, which involves the possibility of resistance, we must also remember that that new life which comes into a man, and moulds his will as well as the rest of his nature, is itself the gift of God. We do not get into a contradiction when we thus speak, we only touch the edge of a great ocean in which our plummets can find no bottom. The same unravellable knot as to the co-operation of the divine and the creatural is found in the natural world, as in the experiences of the Christian soul. You have to work, and your work largely consists in yielding yourselves to the work of God upon you. 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you.' Brethren! If you and I are Christian people, we have put into our hearts and spirits the talent. It depends on us whether we wrap it in a napkin, and stow it away underground somewhere, or whether we use it, and fructify and increase it. If you wrap it in a napkin and put it away underground, when you come to take it out, and want to say, 'Lo! there Thou hast that is Thine,' you will find that it was not solid gold, which could not rust or diminish, but that it has been like some volatile essence, put away in an unventilated place, and imperfectly secured: the napkin is there, but the talent has vanished. We have to work with God, and we can resist. Ay, and there is a deeper and a sadder word than that applied by the same Apostle in another letter to the same subject. We can 'quench' the light and extinguish the fire.

What extinguishes it? Look at the catalogue of sins that lie side by side with this exhortation of my text! They are all small matters—bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil-speaking, malice, stealing, lying, and the like; very 'homely' transgressions, if I may so say. Yes, and if you pile enough of them upon the spark that is in your hearts you will smother it out. Sin, the wrenching of myself away from the influences, not attending to the whispers and suggestions, being blind to the teaching of the Spirit through the Word and through Providence: these are the things that 'grieve the Holy Spirit of God.'

And so, lastly, we have here—

IV. A Tender Motive, a dissuasive from sin, a persuasive to yielding and to righteousness.

Many a man has been kept from doing wrong things by thinking of a sad pale face sitting at home waiting for him. Many a boy has been kept from youthful transgressions which war against his soul here, on the streets of Manchester, full as they are of temptations, by thinking that it would grieve the poor old mother in her cottage, away down in the country somewhere. We can bring that same motive to bear, with infinitely increased force, in regard to our conduct as Christian people. 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.' A father feels a pang if he sees that his child makes no account of some precious gift that he has bestowed upon him, and leaves it lying about anywhere. A loving friend, standing on the margin of the stream, and calling to his friends in a boat when they are drifting to the rapids, turns away sad if they do not attend to his voice. That Divine Spirit pleads with us, and proffers its gifts to us, and turns away—I was going to use too strong a word, perhaps—sick at heart, not because of wounded authority, but because of wounded love and baffled desire to help, when we, in spite of It, will take our own way, neglect the call that warns us of our peril, and leave untouched the gifts that would have made us safe.

Dear brethren, surely such a dissuasive from evil, and such a persuasive to good, is mightier than all abstractions about duty and conscience and right, and the like. 'Do it rightly,' says Paul, 'and you will please Him that hath called you'; leave the evil thing undone, 'and my heart shall be glad, even mine.' You and I can grieve the Christ whose Spirit is given to us. You and I can add something to 'the joy of our Lord.'

GOD'S IMITATORS

'Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children.'—EPH. v. 1.

THE Revised Version gives a more literal and more energetic rendering of this verse by reading, 'Be ye, therefore, *imitators* of God, *as beloved* children.' It is the only place in the Bible where that bold word 'imitate' is applied to the Christian relation to God. But, though the expression is unique, the idea underlies the whole teaching of the New Testament on the subject of Christian character and conduct. To be like God, and to set ourselves to resemble Him, is the sum of all duty; and in the measure in which we approximate thereto, we come to perfection. So, then, there are here just two points that I would briefly touch upon now—the one is the sublime precept of the text, and the other the all-sufficient motive enforcing it. 'Be ye imitators of God as'—because you are, and know yourselves to be—'beloved children,' and it therefore behoves you to be like your Father.

I. First, then, this sublime precept.

Now notice that, broad as this precept is, and all-inclusive of every kind of excellence and duty as it may be, the Apostle has a very definite and specific meaning in it. There is one feature, and only one, in which, accurately speaking, a man may be like God. Our limited knowledge can never be like the ungrowing perfect wisdom of God. Our holiness cannot be like His, for there are many points in our nature and character which have no relation or correspondence to anything in the divine nature. But what is left? Love is left. Our other graces are not like the God to whom they cleave. My faith is not like His faithfulness. My obedience is not like His authority. My submission is not like His autocratic power. My emptiness is not like His fulness. My aspirations are not like His gratifying of them. They correspond to God, but correspondence is not similarity; rather it presupposes unlikeness. Just as a concavity will fit into a convexity, for the very reason that it is concave and not convex, so the human unlikenesses, which are correspondent to God, are the characteristics by which it becomes possible that we should cleave to Him and inhere in Him. But whilst there is much in which He stands alone and incomparable, and whilst we have all to say, 'Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?' or what likeness shall we compare unto Him? we yet can obey in reference to one thing, —and to one thing only, as it seems to me—the commandment of my text, 'Be ye imitators of God.' We can be *like* Him in nothing else, but our love not only corresponds to His, but is of the same quality and nature as His, howsoever different it may be in sweep and in fervour and in degree. The tiniest drop that hangs upon the tip of a thorn will be as perfect a sphere as the sun, and it will have its little rainbow on its round, with all the prismatic colours, the same in tint and order and loveliness, as when the bow spans the heavens. The dew-drop may imitate the sun, and we are to be imitators of God; knit to Him by the one thing in us which is kindred to Him in the deepest sense—the love that is the life of God and the perfecting of man.

Well, then, notice how the Apostle in the context fastens upon a certain characteristic of that divine love which we are to imitate in our lives; and thereby makes the precept a very practical and a very difficult one. Godlike love will be love that gives as liberally as His does. What is the very essence of all love? Longing to be like. And the purest and deepest love is love which desires to impart itself, and that is God's love. The Bible seems to teach us that in a very mysterious sense, about which the less we say the less likely we are to err, there is a quality of giving up, as well as of giving, in God's love; for we read of the Father that 'spared not His Son,' by which is meant, not that He did not shrink from inflicting something upon the Son, but that He did not grudgingly keep that Son for Himself. 'He spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up to the death for us all.' And if we can say but little about that surrender on the part of the infinite

Fountain of all love, we can say that Jesus Christ, who is the activity of the Father's love, spared not Himself, but, as the context puts it. 'gave Himself *up* for us.'

And that is the pattern for us. That thought is not a subject to be decorated with tawdry finery of eloquence, or to be dealt with as if it were a sentimental prettiness very fit to be spoken of, but impossible to be practised. It is the duty of every Christian man and woman, and they have not done their duty unless they have learned that the bond which unites them to men is, in its nature, the very same as the bond which unites men to God; and that they will not have lived righteously unless they learn to be 'imitators of God,' in the surrender of themselves for their brother's good.

Ah, friend, that grips us very tight—and if there were a little more reality and prose brought into our sentimental talk about Christian love, and that love were more often shown in action, in all the self-suppression and taking a lift of a world's burdens, which its great Pattern demands, the world would be less likely to curl a scornful lip at the Church's talk about brotherly love.

You say that you are a Christian—that is to say a child of God. Do you know anything, and would anybody looking at you see that you knew anything, about the love which counts no cost and no sacrifice too great to be lavished on the unworthy and the sinful?

But that brings me to another point. The Apostle here, in the context, not for the sake of saying pretty things, but for the sake of putting sharp points on Christian duty, emphasises another thought, that Godlike love will be a forgiving love. Why should we be always waiting for the other man to determine our relations to him, and consider that if he does not like us we are absolved from the duty of loving him? Why should we leave him to settle the terms upon which we are to stand? God has love, as the Sermon on the Mount puts it, 'to the unthankful and the evil,' and we shall not be imitating His example unless we carry the same temper into all our relationships with our fellows.

People sit complacently and hear all that I am now trying to enforce, and think it is the right thing for me to say, but do you think it is the right thing for you to do? When a man obviously does not like you, or perhaps tries to harm you, what then? How do you meet him? 'He maketh His sun to shine, and sendeth His rain, on the unthankful and the evil.' 'Be ye imitators of God, as beloved children.'

Now note the all-sufficient motive for this great precept.

The sense of being loved will make loving, and nothing else will. The only power that will eradicate, or break without eradicating, our natural tendency to make ourselves our centres, is the recognition that there, at the heart, and on the central throne of the universe, and the divinest thing in it, there sits perfect and self-sacrificing Love, whose beams warm even us. The only flame that kindles love in a man's heart, whether it be to God or to man, is the recognition that he himself stands in the full sunshine of that blaze from above, and that God has loved him. Our hearts are like reverberating furnaces, and when the fire of the consciousness of the divine love is lit in them, then from sides and roof the genial heat is reflected back again to intensify the central flame.

Love begets love, and according to Paul, and according to John, and according to the Master of both of them, if a man loves God, then that glowing beam will glow whether it is turned to earth or turned to heaven.

The Bible does not cut love into two, and keep love to God in one division of the heart and love to man in another, but regards them as one and the same; the same sentiment, the same temper, the same attitude of heart and mind, only that in the one case the love soars, and in the other it lives along the level. The two are indissolubly tied together.

It is because a man knows himself to be beloved that therefore he is stimulated and encouraged to be an 'imitator of God,' and, on the other hand, the sense of being God's child underlies all real imitation of Him. Imitation is natural to the child. It is a miserable home where a boy does not imitate his father, and it is the father's fault in nine cases out of ten if he does not. Whoever feels himself to be a beloved child is thereby necessarily drawn to model himself on the Father that he loves, because he knows that the Father loves him.

So I come to the blessed truth that Christian morality does not say to us, 'Now begin, and work, and tinker away at yourselves, and try to get up some kind of excellence of character, and then come to God, and pray Him to accept you.' That is putting the cart before the horse. The order is reversed. We are to begin with taking our personal salvation and God's love to us for granted, and to work from that. Realise that you are beloved children, and then set to work to live accordingly. If we are ever to do what is our bounden duty to do, in all the various relations of life, we must begin with recognising, with faithful and grateful hearts, the love wherewith God has loved us. We are to think much and confidently of ourselves as beloved of God, and that, and only that, will make us loving to men.

The Nile floods the fields of Egypt and brings greenness and abundance wherever its waters are carried, because thousands of miles away, close up to the Equator, the snows have melted and filled the watercourses in the far-off wilderness. And so, if we are to go out into life, living illustrations and messengers of a love that has redeemed even us, we must, in many a solitary moment, and in the depths of our quiet hearts, realise and keep fast the conviction that God hath loved us, and Christ hath died for us.

But a solemn consideration has to be pressed on all our consciences, and that is that there is something wrong with a man's Christian confidence whose assurance that he himself possesses a share in the love of God in Christ, is not ever moving him to imitation of the love in which he trusts. It is a shame that any one without Christian faith and love should be as charitable, as open to pity and to help, as earnest in any sort of philanthropic work, as Christian men and women are. But godless and perfectly secular philanthropy treads hard on the heels of Christian charity to-day. The more shame to us if we have been eating our morsels alone, and hugging ourselves in the possession of the love which has redeemed us; and if it has not quickened us to the necessity of copying it in our relations to our fellows. There is something dreadfully wrong about such a Christian character. 'He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God whom he hath not seen?'

Take these plain principles, and honestly fit them to your characters and lives, and you will revolutionise both.

WHAT CHILDREN OF LIGHT SHOULD BE

'Walk as children of light.'—Eph. v. 8.

It was our Lord who coined this great name for His disciples. Paul's use of it is probably a reminiscence of the Master's, and so is a hint of the existence of the same teachings as we now find in the existing Gospels, long before their day. Jesus Christ said, 'Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light'; and Paul gives substantially the same account of the way by which a man becomes a Son of the Light when he says, in the words preceding my text, 'Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord.'

Union with Him makes light, just as the bit of carbon will glow as long as it is in contact with the electric force, and subsides again into darkness when that is switched off. To be in Christ is to be a child of light, and to believe in Christ is to be in Him.

But the intense moral earnestness of our Apostle is indicated by the fact that on both occasions in which he uses this designation he does so, not for the purpose of heightening the sense of the honour and prerogative attached to it, but for the sake of deducing from it plain and stringent moral duties, and heightening the sense of obligation to holy living.

'Walk as children of light.' Be true to your truest, deepest self. Manifest what you are. Let the sweet, sacred secrets of inward communion come out in the trivialities of ordinary conduct; make of your every thought a deed, and see to it that every deed be vitalised and purified by its contact with the great truths and thoughts that lie in this name. These are various ways of putting this one all-sufficient directory of conduct.

Now, in the context, the Apostle expands this concentrated exhortation in three or four different directions, and perhaps we may best set forth its meaning if we shape our remarks by these. I venture to cast them, for the sake of emphasis, into a hortatory form.

I. Aim at an all-round productiveness of the natural fruits of the light.

The true reading is, 'Walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light' (not *spirit*, as the Authorised Version reads it) 'is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' Now, it is obvious that the alteration of 'light' instead of 'spirit' brings the words into connection with the preceding and the following. The reference to the 'fruits of the spirit' would be entirely irrelevant in this place; a reference to the 'fruit of the *light*,' as being every form of goodness and righteousness and truth, is altogether in place.

There is, then, a natural tendency in the light to blossom out into all forms and types of goodness. 'Fruit' suggests the idea of natural, silent, spontaneous, effortless growth. And, although that is by no means a sufficient account of the process by which bad men become good men, it is an inseparable element, in all true moral renovation, that it be the natural outcome and manifestation of an inward principle; otherwise it is mere hypocritical adornment, or superficial appearance. If we are to do good we must first of all *be* good. If from us there are to come righteousness and truth, and all other graces of character, there must, first of all, be the radical change which is involved in passing from separateness in the darkness to union with Jesus Christ in the light. The Apostle's theory of moral renovation is that you must begin with the implantation in the spirit of the source of all moral goodness—viz. Jesus Christ—brought into the heart by the uniting power of humble faith. And then there will be lodged in our being a vital power, of which the natural outcome will be all manner of fair and pure things. Effort is needed, as I shall have to say; but prior to effort there must be union with Jesus Christ.

This wide, general commandment of our text is sufficiently definite, thinks Paul; for if the light be in you it will naturally effloresce into all forms of beauty. Light is the condition of fruitfulness. Everywhere the vital germ is only acted upon by the light. No sunshine, no flowers; darkness produces thin, etiolated, whitened, and feeble shoots at the best. Let the light blaze in, and the blanched feebleness becomes vigorous and unfolds itself. How much more will light be the condition of fruitfulness when the very light itself is the seed from which all fruit is developed.

But, still further, mark how there must be an all-round completeness in order that we shall fairly set forth the glory and power of the light of which our faith makes us children and partakers. The fruit 'is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' These three aspects—the good, the right, the true—may not be a scientific, ethical classification, but they give a sufficiently plain and practical distinction. Goodness, in which the prevailing idea is beneficence and the kindlier virtues; righteousness, which refers to the sterner graces of justice; truth, in which the prevalent idea is conformity in action with facts and the conditions of man's life and entire sincerity—these three do cover, with sufficient completeness, the whole ground of possible human excellence. But the Apostle widens them still further by that little word *all*.

We all tend to cultivate those virtues which are in accordance with our natural dispositions, or are made most easy to us by our circumstances. And there is nothing in which we more need to seek comprehensiveness than in the effort to educate ourselves into, and to educe from ourselves, kinds of goodness and forms of excellence which are not naturally in accordance with our dispositions, or facilitated by our circumstances. The tree planted in the shrubbery will grow all lopsided; the bushes on the edge of the cliff will be shorn away on the windward side by the teeth of the south-western gale, and will lean over northwards, on the side of least resistance. And so we all are apt to content ourselves with doing the good things that are easiest for us, or that fit into our temperament and character. Jesus Christ would have us to be all-round men, and would that we should seek to aim after and possess the kinds of excellence that are least cognate to our characters. Are you strong, and do you pride yourself upon your firmness? Cultivate gentleness. Are you amiable, and pride yourself, perhaps, upon your sympathetic tenderness? Try to get a little iron and quinine into your constitution. Seek to be the man that you are least likely to be, and aim at a comprehensive development of '*all* righteousness and goodness and truth.'

Further, remember that this all-round completeness is not attained as the result of an effortless growth. True, these things are the fruits of the light, but also true, they are the prizes of struggle and the trophies of warfare. No man will ever attain to the comprehensive moral excellence which it is in his own power to win; no Christian will ever be as all-round a good man as he has the opportunities of being, unless he makes it his business, day by day, to aim after the conscious increase of gifts that he possesses, and the conscious appropriation and possession of those of which he is still lacking. 'Nothing of itself will come,' or very little. True, the light will shine out in variously tinted ray if it be in a man, as surely as from the seed come the blade and the ear and the full corn in the ear, but you will not have nor keep the light which thus will unfold itself unless you put forth appropriate effort. Christ comes into our hearts, but we have to bring Him there. Christ dwells in our hearts, but we have to work into our nature, and work out in action, the gifts that He bestows. They will advance but little in the divine life who trust to the natural unfolding of the supernatural life within them, and do not help its unfolding by their own resolute activity. 'Walk as children of the light.' There is your duty, for 'the fruit of the light is all righteousness.' One might have supposed that the commandments would be, 'Be passive as children of the light, for the light will grow.' But the Apostle binds together, as always, the two things, the divine working and the human effort at reception, retention, and application of that divine work, just as he does in the great classical passage, 'Work out your own salvation, for it is God that worketh in you.'

II. Secondly, the general exhortation of my text widens out itself into this—test all things by Christ's approval of them.

'Proving what is well pleasing unto the Lord.' That, according to the natural construction of the Greek, is the main way by which the Apostle conceives that his general commandment of 'walking as children of the light' is to be carried out. You do it if, step by step, and moment by moment, and to every action of life, you apply this standard—Does Christ like it? Does it please Him? When that test is rigidly applied, then, and only then, will you walk as becomes the children of the light.

So, then, there is a standard—not what men approve, not what my conscience, partially illuminated, may say is permissible, not what is recognised as allowable by the common maxims of the world round about us, but Christ's approval. How different the hard, stern, and often unwelcome prescriptions of law and rigidity of some standards of right become when they are changed into that which pleases the Divine Lord and Lover! Surely it is something blessed that the hard, cold, and to such a large extent powerless conceptions of duty or obligation shall be changed into pleasing Jesus Christ; and that so our hearts shall be enlisted in the service of our consciences, and love shall be glad to do the Beloved's will. There are many ways by which the burden of life's obligations is lightened to the Christian. I do not know that any of them is more precious than the fact that law is changed into His will, and that we seek to do what is right because it pleases the Master. There is the standard.

It will be easy for us to come to the right appreciation of individual actions when we are living in the light. Union with Jesus Christ will make us quick to discern His will. We have a conscience;—well, that needs educating and enlightening, and very often correcting. We have the Word of God;—well, that needs explanation, and needs to be brought close to our hearts. If we have Christ dwelling in us, in the measure in which we are in sympathy with Him, we shall be gifted with clear eyes, not indeed to discern the expedient—that belongs to another region altogether—but we shall be gifted with very clear eyes to discern right from wrong, and there will be an instinctive recoil from the evil, and an instinctive attachment of ourselves to the good. If we are in the Lord we shall easily be able to prove what is acceptable and well-pleasing to Him.

We shall never walk as the children of the light, unless we have the habit of referring everything, trifles and great things, to His arbitrament, and seeking in them all to do what is pleasing in His sight. The smallest deed may be brought under the operation of the largest principles. Gravitation influences the microscopic grain of sand as well as planets and sun. There is nothing so small but you can bring it into this category—it either pleases or displeases Jesus Christ. And the faults into which Christian men fall and in which they continue are very largely owing to their carelessness in applying this standard to the small things of their daily lives. The sleepy Custom House officers let the contraband article in because it seems to be of small bulk. There are old stories about how strong castles were taken by armed men hidden in an innocent-looking cart of forage. Do you keep up a rigid inspection at the frontier, and see to it that everything vindicates its right to enter because it is pleasing to Jesus Christ.

III. Thirdly, we have here another expansion of the general command, and that is—keep well separate from the darkness.

Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of

darkness, but rather reprove them.' Now, your time will not allow me to dwell, as I had hoped to do, upon the considerations to be suggested here. The very briefest possible mention of them is all that I can afford.

'The unfruitful works of darkness';—well, then, the darkness has its works, but though they be works they are not worth calling fruit. That is to say, nothing except the conduct which flows from union with Jesus Christ so corresponds to the man's nature and relations, or has any such permanence about it as to entitle it to be called fruit. Other acts may be 'works,' but Paul will not dishonour the great word 'fruit' by applying it to such rubbish as these, and so he brands them as 'unfruitful works of darkness.'

Keep well clear of them, says the Apostle. He is not talking here about the relations between Christians and others, but about the relations between Christian men and the *works* of darkness. Only, of course, in order to avoid fellowship with the works you will sometimes have to keep yourselves well separate from their doers. Much association with such men is forced upon us by circumstances, and much is the imperative duty of Christian beneficence and charity. But I venture to express the strong and growing conviction that there are few exhortations that the secularised Church of this generation needs more than this commandment of my text: 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' 'What communion hath light with darkness?' Ah! we see plenty of it, unnatural as it is, in the so-called Church of to-day. 'What concord hath Christ with Belial? What part hath he that believeth with an infidel? Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate.'

And, brethren, remember, a part of the separation is that your light shall be a constant condemnation of the darkness. 'But rather reprove them,' says my text; that is a work that devolves upon all Christians. It is to be done, no doubt, by the silent condemnation of evil which ever comes from the quiet doing of good. As an old preacher has it, 'The presence of a saint hinders the devil of elbow-room for doing his tricks.' The old legend told us that the fire-darting Apollo shot his radiant arrows against the pythons and 'dragons of the slime.' The sons of light have the same office—by their light of life to make the darkness aware of itself, and ashamed of itself; and to change it into light.

But silent reproving is not all our duty. The Christian Church has wofully fallen beneath its duty, not only in regard to its complicity with the social crimes of each generation, but in regard to its cowardly silence towards them; especially when they flaunt and boast themselves in high places. What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to war? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to impurity? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to drunkenness? What has the Church said worthy of itself in regard to the social vices that are honeycombing society and this city to-day? If you are the sons of light, walk as the sons of light, and have 'no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness'; but set the trumpet to your lips, and 'declare unto My people their transgressions, and to the house of Israel their sin.'

THE FRUIT OF THE LIGHT

'The fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.'—
EPH. v. 9 (R.V.)

THIS is one of the cases in which the Revised Version has done service by giving currency to an unmistakably accurate and improved reading. That which stands in our Authorised Version, 'the fruit of the Spirit,' seems to have been a correction made by some one who took offence at the violent metaphor, as he conceived it, that 'light' should bear 'fruit,' and desired to tinker the text so as to bring it into verbal correspondence with another passage in the Epistle to the Galatians, where 'the fruits of the Spirit' are enumerated. But the reading, 'the fruit of the *light*,' has not only the preponderance of manuscript authority in its favour, but is preferable because it preserves a striking image, and is in harmony with the whole context.

The Apostle has just been exhorting his Ephesian friends to walk as 'children of the light,' and before he goes on to expand and explain that injunction he interjects this parenthetical remark, as if he would say, To be true to the light that is in you is the sum of duty, and the condition of perfectness, '*for* the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth.' That connection is entirely destroyed by the substitution of 'spirit.' The whole context, both before and after my text, is full of references to the light as working in the life; and a couple of verses after it we read about 'the unfruitful works of darkness,' an expression which evidently looks back to my text.

So please to understand that our text in this sermon is—'The fruit of the *light* consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.'

I. Now, first of all, I have just a word to say about this light which is fruitful.

Note—for it is, I think, not without significance—a minute variation in the Apostle's language in this verse and in the context. He has been speaking of 'light,' now he speaks of '*the* light'; and that, I think, is not accidental. The expression, 'walk as children of light,' is more general and vague. The expression, 'the fruit of *the* light,' points to some specific source from which all light flows. And observe, also, that we have in the previous context, 'Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye light *in the Lord*,' which evidently implies that the light of which my text speaks is not natural to men, but is the result of the entrance into their darkness of a new element.

Now I do not suppose that we shoud be entitled to say that Paul here is formally anticipating the deep teaching of the Apostle John that Jesus Christ is '*the* Light of men,' and especially of Christian men. But he is distinctly asserting, I think, that the light which blesses and hallows humanity is no diffused glow, but is all gathered and concentrated into one blazing centre, from which it floods the hearts of men. Or, to put away the metaphor, he is here asserting that the only way by which any man can cease to be, in the doleful depths of his nature, darkness in its saddest sense is by opening his heart through faith, that into it there may rush, as the light ever does where an opening—be it only a single tiny cranny—is made, the light which is Christ, and without whom is darkness.

I know, of course, that, apart altogether from the exercise of faith in Jesus Christ, there do shine in men's hearts rays of the light of knowledge and of purity; but if we believe the teaching of Scripture, these, too, are from Christ, in His universally-diffused work, by which, apart altogether from individual faith, or from a knowledge of revelation, He is 'the light that lighteth every man coming into the world.' And I hold that, wheresoever there is conscience, wheresoever there is judgment and reason, wheresoever there are sensitive desires after excellence and nobleness, *there* is a flickering of a light which I believe to be from Christ Himself. But that light, as widely diffused as humanity, fights with, and is immersed in, darkness. In the physical world, light and darkness are mutually exclusive: where the one is the other comes not; but in the spiritual world the paradox is true that the two co-exist. Apart from revelation and the acceptance of Jesus Christ's person and work by our humble faith, the light struggles with the darkness, and the darkness obstinately refuses to admit its entrance, and 'comprehendeth it not.' And so, ineffectual but to make restless and to urge to vain efforts and to lay up material for righteous judgment, is the light that shines in men whose hearts are shut against Christ. The fruitful light is Christ within us, and, unless we know and possess it by the opening of heart and mind and will, the solemn words preceding my text are true of us: 'Ye were sometime darkness.' Oh, brother! do you see to it that the subsequent words are true of you: 'Now are ye light in the Lord.' Only if you are in Christ are you truly light.

II. Now, secondly, notice the fruitfulness of this indwelling light.

Of course the metaphor that light, like a tree, grows and blossoms and puts forth fruit, is a very strong one. And its very violence and incongruity help its force. Fruit is generally used in Scripture in a good sense. It conveys the notion of something which is the natural outcome of a vital power, and so, when we talk about the light being fruitful, we are setting, in a striking image, the great Christian thought that, if you want to get right conduct, you must have renewed character: and that if you have renewed character you will get right conduct. This is the principle of my text. The light has in it a productive power; and the true way to adorn a life with all things beautiful, solemn, lovely, is to open the heart to the entrance of Jesus Christ.

God's way is—first, new life, then better conduct. Men's way is, 'cultivate morality, seek after purity, try to be good.' And surely conscience and experience alike tell us that that is a hopeless effort. To begin with what should be second is an anachronism in morals, and will be sure to result in failure in practice. He is not a wise man that tries to build a house from the chimneys downwards. And to talk about making a man's doings good before you have secured a radical change in the doer, by the infusion into him of the very life of Jesus Christ Himself, is to begin at the top story, instead of at the foundation. Many of us are trying to put the cart before the horse in that fashion. Many of us have made the attempt over and over again, and the attempt always has failed and always will fail. You may do much for the mending of your characters and for the incorporation in your lives of virtues and graces which do not grow there naturally and without effort. I do not want to cut the nerves of any man's strugglings, I do not want to darken the brightness of any man's aspirations, but I do say that the people who, apart from Jesus Christ, and the entrance into their souls by faith of His quickening power, are seeking, some of them nobly, some of them sadly, and all of them vainly, to cure their faults of character, will never attain anything but a superficial and fragmentary goodness, because they have begun at the wrong end.

But 'make the tree good,' and its fruit will be good. Get Christ into your heart, and all fair things will grow as the natural outcome of His indwelling. The fruitfulness of the light is not put upon its right basis until we come to understand that the light is Christ Himself, who, dwelling in our hearts by faith, is made *in* us as well as '*unto* us wisdom, and righteousness, and salvation, and redemption.' The beam that is reflected from the mirror is the very beam that falls on the mirror, and the fair things in life and conduct which Christian people bring forth are in very deed the outcome of the vital power of Jesus Christ which has entered into them. 'I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me,' is the Apostle's declaration in the midst of his struggles; and the perfected saints before the throne cast their crowns at His feet, and say, 'Not unto us! not unto us, but unto Thy name be the glory.' The talent is the Lord's, only the spending of it is the servant's. And so the order of the Divine appointment is, first, the entrance of the light, and then the conduct that flows from it.

Note, too, how this same principle of the fruitfulness of the light gives instruction as to the true place of effort in the Christian life. The main effort ought to be to get more of the light into ourselves. 'Abide in Me, and I in you.' And so, and only so, will fruit come.

And such an effort has to take in hand all the circumference of our being, and to fix thoughts that wander, and to still wishes that clamour, and to empty hearts that are full of earthly loves, and to clear a space in minds that are crammed with thoughts about the transient and the near, in order that the mind may keep in steadfast contemplation of Jesus, and the heart may be bound to Him by cords of love that are not capable of being snapped, and scarcely of being stretched, and the will may in patience stand saying, 'Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth'; and the whole tremulous nature may be rooted and built up in and on Him. Ah, brother! if we understand all that goes to the fulfilment of that one sweet and merciful injunction, 'Abide in Me,' we shall recognise that there is the field on which Christian effort is mainly to be occupied.

But that is not all. For there must be likewise the effort to appropriate, and still more to manifest in conduct, the fruit-bringing properties of that indwelling light. 'Giving all diligence add to your faith.' 'Having these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.' We are often told that just as we trust Christ for our forgiveness and acceptance, so we are to trust Him for our sanctifying and perfecting. It is true, and yet it is not true. We are to trust Him for our sanctifying and our perfecting. But the faith which trusts Him for these is not a substitute for effort, but it is the foundation of effort. And the more we rely on His power to cleanse us from all evil, the more are we bound to make the effort in His power and in dependence on Him, to cleanse ourselves from all evil, and to secure as our own the natural outcomes of His dwelling within us, which are 'the fruits of the light.'

III. And so, lastly, notice the specific fruits which the Apostle here dwells upon.

They consist, says he, in all goodness and righteousness and truth. Now 'goodness' here seems to me to be used in its narrower sense, just as the same Apostle uses it in the Epistle to the Romans, in contrast with 'righteousness,' where he says, 'for a good man some would even dare to die.' There he means by 'good,' as he does here by 'goodness,' not the general expression for all forms of virtue and gracious conduct, but the specific excellence of kindliness, amiability, or the like. 'Righteousness,' again, is that which rigidly adheres to the strict law of duty, and carefully desires to give to every man what belongs to him, and to every relation of life what it requires. And 'truth' is rather the truth of sincerity, as opposed to hypocrisy and lies and shams, than the intellectual truth as opposed to error.

Now, all these three types of excellence—kindliness, righteousness, truthfulness—are apt to be separated. For the first of them—amiability, kindliness, gentleness—is apt to become too soft, to lose its grip of righteousness, and it needs the tonic of the addition of those other graces, just as you need lime in water if it is to make bone. Righteousness, on the other hand, is apt to become stern, and needs the softening of goodness to make it human and attractive. The rock is grim when it is bare; it wants verdure to drape it if it is to be lovely. Truth needs kindliness and righteousness, and they need truth. For there are men who pride themselves on 'speaking out,' and take rudeness and want of regard for other people's sensitive feelings to be sincerity. And, on the other hand, it is possible that amiability may be sweeter than truth is, and that righteousness may be hypocritical and insincere. So Paul says, 'Let this white light be resolved in the prism of your characters into the threefold rays of kindliness, righteousness, truthfulness.'

And then, again, he desires that each of us should try to make our own a fully developed, all-round perfection—*all* goodness and righteousness and truth; of every sort, that is, and in every degree. We are all apt to cultivate graces of character which correspond to our natural disposition and make. We are all apt to become *torsos*, fragmentary, one-sided, like the trees that grow against a brick wall, or those which stand exposed to the prevailing blasts from one quarter of the sky. But we should seek to appropriate types of excellence to which we are least inclined, as well as those which are most in harmony with our natural dispositions. If you incline to kindliness, try to brace yourselves with righteousness; if you incline to righteousness, to take the stern, strict view of duty, and to give to every man what he deserves, remember that you do not give men their dues unless you give them a great deal more than their deserts, and that righteousness does not perfectly allot to our fellows what they ought to receive from us, unless we give them pity and indulgence and forbearance and forgiveness when it is needed. The one light breaks into all colours—green in the grass, purple and red in the flowers, flame-coloured in the morning sky, blue in the deep sea. The light that is in us ought, in like manner, to be analysed into, and manifested in, 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report.'

And so, dear friends, here is a test for us all. Devout emotion, orthodox creed, practical diligence in certain forms of benevolence and philanthropic work, are all very well; but Jesus Christ came to make us like Himself, and to turn our darkness into light that betrays its source by its resemblance, though it be a weakened one, to the sun from which it came. We have no right to call ourselves Christ's followers unless we are, in some measure, Christ's pictures.

Here is a message of cheer and hope for us all. We have all tried, and tried, and tried, over and over again, to purge and mend these poor characters of ours. How long the toil, how miserable and poor the results! A million candles will not light the night; but when God's mercy of sunrise comes above the hills, beasts of prey slink to their dens and birds begin to sing, and flowers open, and growth resumes again. We cannot mend ourselves except partially and superficially; but we can open will, heart, and mind, by faith, for His entrance; and where He comes, there He slays the evil creatures that live in and love the dark, and all gracious things will blossom into beauty. If we are in the Lord we shall be light; and if the Lord, who is the Light, is in us, we, too, shall bear fruits of 'all righteousness and goodness and truth.'

PLEASING CHRIST

'Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.'—EPH. v. 10.

THESE words are closely connected with those which precede them in the 8th verse—'Walk as children of light.' They further explain the mode by which that commandment is to be fulfilled. They who, as children of light, mindful of their obligations and penetrated by its brightness, seek to conform their active life to the light to which they belong, are to do so by making experiment of, or investigating and determining, what is 'acceptable to the Lord.' It is the sum of all Christian duty, a brief compendium of conduct, an all-sufficient directory of life.

There need only be two remarks made by way of explanation of my text. One is that the expression rendered 'acceptable' is more accurately and forcibly given, as in the Revised Version, by the plainer word 'well-pleasing.' And the other is that 'the Lord' here, as always in the New Testament—unless the context distinctly forbids it—means Jesus Christ. Here the context distinctly demands it. For only a sentence or two before, the Apostle has been speaking about 'those who were sometime darkness having been made light in the Lord'—which is obviously in Jesus Christ.

And here, therefore, what pleases *Christ* is the Christian's highest duty, and the one prescription which is required to be obeyed in order to walk in the light is, to do that which pleases Him.

I. So, then, in these brief words, so comprehensive, and going so deep into the secrets of holy and noble living, I want you to notice that we have, first, the only attitude which corresponds to our relations to Christ.

How remarkable it is that this Apostle should go on the presumption that our conduct affects Him, that it is possible for us to please, or to displease Jesus Christ now. We often wonder whether the beloved dead are cognisant of what we do; and whether any emotions of something like either our earthly complacency or displeasure, can pass across the undisturbed calm of their hearts, if they are aware of what their loved ones here are doing. That question has to be left very much in the dark, however our hearts may sometimes seek to enforce answers. But this we know, that that loving Lord, not merely by the omniscience of His divinity, but by the perpetual knowledge and sympathy of His perfect manhood, is not only cognizant of, but is affected by, the conduct of His professed followers here on earth. And since it is true that He now is not swept away into some oblivious region where the dead are, but is close beside us all, cognizant of every act, watching every thought, and capable of having something like a shadow of a pang passing across the Divine depth of His eternal joy and repose at the right hand of God, then, surely, the only thing that corresponds to such a relationship as at present subsists between the Christian soul and the Lord is that we should take as our supreme and continual aim that, 'whether present or absent, we should be well-pleasing to Him.' Nor does that demand rest only upon the realities of our present relation to that Lord, but it goes back to the past facts on which our present relation rests. And the only fitting response to what He has been and done for us is that we should, each of us, in the depth of our hearts, and in the widest circumference of the surface of our lives, enthrone Him as absolute Lord, and take His good pleasure as our supreme law. Jesus Christ is

King because He is Redeemer. The only adequate response to what He has done for me is that I should absolutely submit myself to Him, and say to Him, 'O Lord! truly I am Thy servant! Thou hast loosed my bonds.' The one fitting return to make for that Cross and Passion is to enthrone His will upon my will, and to set Him as absolute Monarch over the whole of my nature. Thoughts, affections, purposes, efforts, and all should crown Him King, because He has died for me. The conduct which corresponds to the relations which we bear to Christ as the present Judge of our work, and the Redeemer of our souls by His mighty deed in the past, is this of my text, to make my one law His will, and to please Him that hath called me to be His soldier.

The meaning of being a Christian is that, in return for the gift of a whole Christ, I give my whole self to Him. 'Why call ye me Lord! Lord! and do not the things which I say?' If He is what He assuredly is to every one of us, nothing can be plainer than that we are thereby bound by obligations which are not iron, but are more binding than if they were, because they were woven out of the cords of love and the bands of a man, bound to serve Him supremely, Him only, Him always, Him by the suppression of self, and the making His pleasure our law.

II. Now, secondly, let me ask you to notice that we have here the all-sufficient guide for practical life.

It sounds very mystical, and a trifle vague, to say, Do everything to please Jesus Christ. It is all-comprehensive; it is mystical in the sense that it goes down below the mere surface of prescriptions about conduct. But it is not vague, and it is capable of immediate application to every part, and to every act, of every man's life.

For what is it that pleases Jesus Christ? His own likeness; as, according to the old figure—which is, I suppose, true to spiritual facts, whether to external facts or not—the refiner knows that the metal is ready to flow when he can see his own face in it. Jesus Christ desires most that we should all be like Him. That we are to bear His image is as comprehensive, and at the same time as specific, a way of setting forth the sum of Christian duty, as are the words of my text. The two phrases mean the same thing.

And what is the likeness to Jesus Christ which it is thus our supreme obligation and our truest wisdom and perfection to bear? Well! we can put it all into two words—self-suppression and continual consciousness of obedience to the Divine will. The life of Jesus Christ, in its brief records in Scripture, is felt by every thoughtful man to contain within its narrow compass adequate direction for, and to set forth the ideal of, human life. That is not because He went through all varieties of earthly experience, for He did not. The life of a Jewish peasant nineteen centuries ago was extremely unlike the life of a Manchester merchant, of a college professor, of a successful barrister, of a struggling mother, in this present day. But in the narrow compass of that life there are set forth these two things, which are the basis of all human perfection—the absolute annihilation of self-regard, and the perpetual recognition of a Divine will. These are the things which every Christian man and woman is bound by the power of Christ's Cross to translate into the actions correspondent with their particular circumstances. And so the student at his desk and the sailor on his deck, the miner in his pit, the merchant on 'Change, the worker in various handicrafts, may each be sure that they are doing what is pleasing to Christ if, in their widely different ways, they seek to do what they can do in all the varieties of life—crucify self, and commune with God.

That is not easy. Whatever may be the objections to be brought against this summary of Christian duty, the objection that it is vague is the last that can be sustained. Try it, and you will find out that it is anything but vague. It will grip tight enough, depend upon it. It will go deep enough down into all the complexities of our varying circumstances. If it has a fault (which it has not) it is in the direction of too great stringency for unaided human nature. But the stringency is not too great when we depend upon Him to help us, and an impossible ideal is a certain prophet of its own fulfilment some day.

So, brethren, here is the sufficient guide, not because it cumbers us with a mass of wretched little prescriptions such as a martinet might give, about all sorts of details of conduct. That is left to profitless casuists like the ancient rabbis. But the broad principles will effloresce into all manner of perfectnesses and all fruits. He that has in his heart these thoughts, that the definition of virtue is pleasing Jesus Christ, that the concrete form of goodness is likeness to Him, and that the elements of likeness to Him are these two, that I should never think about myself, and always think about God, needs no other guide or instructor to fill his life with 'whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,' and to make his own all that the world calls virtue, and all which the consciences of good men have conspired to praise.

But not only does this guide prove its sufficiency by reason of its comprehensiveness, but also because there is no difficulty in ascertaining what at each moment it prescribes. Of course, I know that such a precept as this cannot contain in itself guidance in matters of mere practical expediency. But, apart from these—which are to be determined by the ordinary exercise of prudence and common sense—in regard to the right and the wrong of our actions, I believe that if a man wants to know Christ's will, and takes the way of knowing it which Christ has appointed, he shall not be left in darkness, but shall have the light of life.

For love has a strange power of divining love's wishes, as we all know, and as many a sweetness in the hearts and lives of many of us has shown us. If we cherish sympathy with Jesus Christ we shall look on things as He looks on them, and we shall not be left without the knowledge of what His pleasure is. If we keep near enough to Him the glance of His eye will do for guidance, as the old psalm has it. They are rough animal natures that do not understand how to go, unless their instructors be the crack of the whip or the tug of the bridle. 'I will guide thee with Mine eye.' A glance is enough where there are mutual understanding and love. Two musical instruments in adjoining rooms, tuned to the same pitch, have a singular affinity, and if a note be struck on the one the other will vibrate to the sound. And so hearts here that love Jesus Christ and keep in unison with Him, and are sympathetic with His desires, will learn to know His will, and will re-echo the music that comes from Him. And if our supreme desire is to know what pleases Jesus Christ, depend upon it the desire will not be in vain. 'If any man wills to do His will he shall know of the doctrine.' Ninety per cent. of all our perplexities as to conduct come from our not having a pure and simple wish to do what is right in His sight, clearly supreme above all others. When we have that wish it is never left unsatisfied.

And even if sometimes we do make a mistake as to what is Christ's pleasure, if our supreme wish and honest aim in the mistake have been to do His pleasure, we may be sure that He will be pleased with the deed. Even though its body is not that which He willed us to do, its spirit is that which He does desire. And if we do a wrong thing, a thing in itself displeasing to Him, whilst all the while we desired to please Him, we shall please Him in the deed which would otherwise have displeased Him. And so two Christian men, for instance, who take opposite sides in a controversy, may both of them be doing what is well-pleasing in His sight, whilst they are contradicting one another, if they are doing it for His sake. And it is possible that the inquisitor and his victim may both have been serving Christ. At all events, let us be sure of this, that whensoever we desire to please Him, He will help us to do it, and ordinarily will help us by making clear to us the path on which His smile rests.

III. Again, notice that we have here an all-powerful motive for Christian life.

The one thing which all other summaries of duty lack is motive power to get themselves carried into practice. But we all know, from our own happy human experience, that no motive which can be brought to bear upon men is stronger, when there are loving hearts concerned, than this simple one, 'Do it to please me.' And that is what Jesus Christ really says. That is no piece of mere sentiment, brethren, nor of mere pulpit rhetoric. That is the deepest thought of Christian morality, and is the distinctive peculiarity which gives the morality of the New Testament its clear supremacy over all other. There are precepts in it far nobler and loftier than can be found elsewhere. The perspective of virtues and graces in it is different from that which ordinarily prevails amongst men. But I do not think that it is in the details of its precepts so much as in the communication of power to obey them, and in the suggestion of the motive which makes them all easy, that the difference of Christ's ethics from all the teaching of the world beside is most truly to be found.

And here lies the excellence thereof. It is a poor, cold thing to say to a man, 'Do this because it is right.' It is a still more powerless thing to say to him, 'Do this because it is expedient.' 'Do this because, in the long run, it leads to happiness.' It is all different when you say, 'Do this to please Jesus Christ, to please that Christ who pleased not Himself but gave Himself for you.' That is the fire that melts the ore. That is the heat that makes flexible the hard, stiff material. That is the motive which makes duty delight, which makes 'the rough places plain' and 'the crooked things straight.' It does not abolish natural tastes, it does not supersede natural disinclinations, but it does smooth and soften unwelcome and hard tasks, and it invests service with a halo of glory, and changes the coldness of duty into rosy light; as when the sunrise strikes on the peaks of the frozen mountains. The one motive which impels men, and can be trusted to secure in them whatsoever things are noble, is to please Him.

So we have the secret of blessedness in these words. For self-submission and suppression are blessedness. Our miseries come from our unbridled wills, far more than from our sensitive organisations. It is because we do not accept providences that providences hurt. It is because we do not accept the commandments that the commandments are burdensome. Those who have no will, except as it is vitalised by God's will, have found the secret of blessedness, and have entered into rest. In the measure in which we approximate to that condition, our wills will be strengthened as well as our hearts set at ease.

And blessedness comes, too, because the approbation of the Master, which is the aim of the servant, is reflected in the satisfaction of an approving conscience, which points onwards to the time when the Master's approval shall be revealed in the servant's glory.

I was reading the other day about a religious reformer who arose in Eastern lands a few years since, and gathered many disciples. He and his principal follower were seized and about to be martyred. They were suspended by cords from a gibbet, to be fired at by a platoon of soldiers. And as they hung there, the disciple turned to his teacher, and as his last word on earth said, 'Master! are you satisfied with me?' His answer was a silent smile; and the next minute a bullet was in his heart. Dear brethren, do you turn to Jesus Christ with the same question, 'Master! art Thou satisfied with me?' and you will get His smile here; and hereafter, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS

'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.'—EPH. v. 11.

WE have seen in a former sermon that 'the fruit,' or outcome, 'of the Light' is a comprehensive perfection, consisting in all sorts and degrees of goodness and righteousness and truth. Therefore, the commandment, 'Walk as children of the light,' sums up all Christian morality. Is there need, then, for any additional precept? Yes; for Christian people do not live in an empty world. If there were no evil round them, and no proclivity to evil within them, it would be amply sufficient to say to them, 'Be true to the light which you behold.' But since both these things are, the commandment of my text is further necessary. We do not work *in vacuo*, and therefore friction and atmosphere have to be taken account of; and an essential part of 'walking as children of the light' is to know how to behave ourselves when confronted with 'the works of darkness.'

These Ephesian Christians lived in a state of society honeycombed with hideous immorality, the centre of which was the temple, which was their city's glory and shame. It was all but impossible for them to have nothing to do with the works of evil, unless, indeed, they went out of the world. But the difficulty of obedience does not affect the duty of obedience, nor slacken in the smallest degree the stringency of a command. This obligation lies upon us as fully as it did upon them, and the discharge of it by professing Christians would bring new life to moribund churches.

I. Let me ask you to note with me, first, the fruitlessness inherent in all the works of darkness.

You may remember that I pointed out, in a former discourse on the context, that the Apostle, here and elsewhere, draws a very significant distinction between 'works' and 'fruit,' and that distinction is put very strikingly in the words of my text. There are works which are barren. It is a grim thought that there may be abundant activity which, in the eyes of God, comes to just nothing; and that pages and pages of laborious calculations, when all summed up, have for result a great round O. Men are busy, and hosts of them are doing what the old fairy stories tell us that evil spirits were condemned to do—spinning ropes out of sea-sand; and their life-work is nought when they come to reckon it up.

I have no time to dwell upon this thought, but I wish, just for a moment or two, to illustrate it.

All godless life is fruitless, inasmuch as it has no permanent results. Permanent results of a sort, indeed, follow everything that men do, for all our actions tend to make character, and they all have a share in fixing that which depends upon character—viz. destiny, both here and yonder. And thus the most fleeting of our deeds, which in one aspect is as transitory as the snow upon the great plains when the sun rises, leaves everlasting traces upon ourselves and upon our condition. But yet acts concerned with transitory things may have permanent fruit, or may be as transient as the things with which they are concerned. And the difference depends on the spirit in which they are done. If the roots are only in the surface-skin of soil, when that is pared off the plant goes. A life that is to be eternal must strike its roots through all the superficial *humus* down to the very heart of things. When its roots twine themselves round God then the deeds which blossom from them will blossom unfading for ever.

Think of men going empty-handed into another world, and saying, 'O Lord! I made a big fortune in Manchester when I lived there, and I left it all behind me'; or, 'I mastered a science, and one gleam of the light of eternity has antiquated it'; or, 'I gained prizes, won my aims, and they have all dropped from my hands, and here I stand, having to say in the most tragic sense: Nothing in my hands I bring.' And another man dies in the Lord, and his 'works do follow' him. It is not every vintage that bears exportation. Some wines are mellowed by crossing the ocean; some are turned into vinegar. The works of darkness are unfruitful because they are transient.

And they are unfruitful because, whilst they last, they yield no real satisfaction. The Apostle could say to another Church with a certainty as to what the answer would be, 'What fruit had ye *then*'—when ye were doing them—'in the things whereof ye are now ashamed?' And the answer is 'None!' Of course, it is true that men do bad things because they like them better than good. Of course, it is true that the misery of mankind is that they have no appetite in the general for the only real satisfaction. But it is also true that no man who feeds his heart and mind on anything short of God is really at rest in anything that he does or possesses. Occasional twinges of conscience, dim perceptions that after all they are walking in a vain show; glimpses of nobler possibilities, a vague unrest, an unwillingness to reflect and look the facts of their condition in the face, like men that will not take stock because they half suspect that they are insolvent—these are the conditions that attach to all godless men's lives. There is no real fruit for their thirsty lips to feed upon. The smallest man is too large to be satisfied with anything short of Infinity. The human heart is like some narrow opening on a hill-side, so narrow that it looks as if a glassful of water would fill it. But it goes away down, down.

down into the depths of the mountain, and you may pour in hogsheads and no effect is visible. God, and God alone, brings to the thirsty heart the fruit that it needs.

Another solemn thought illustrates the unfruitfulness of a godless life. There is no correspondence between what such a man does and what he is intended to do. Think of what the most degraded and sensuous wretch that shambles about the slums of a city, sodden with beer and rotten with profligacy, could be. Think of the raptures of devout contemplation and the energies of holy work which are possible for that soul, and then say—though it is an extreme case, the principle holds in less extreme cases—Are these things that men do apart from God, however shining, noble, illustrious they may be in the eyes of the world, and trumpeted forth by the mouthpieces of popular opinion, are these things worth calling fruits fit to be borne by such a tree? No more than the cankers on a rose-bush or the galls on an oak-tree are worthy of being called fruit are these works that some of you have as the only products of a life's activity. 'Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?'

II. And now, secondly, notice the plain Christian duty of abstinence.

'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.' Now, the text, as it stands in our version, seems to suggest that these dark works are personified as companions whom a good man ought to avoid; and that, therefore, the bearing of the exhortation is, 'Have nothing to do, in your own individual lives, with evil things that one man can commit.' But I take it that, important as that injunction and prohibition is, the Apostle's meaning is somewhat different, and that my text would perhaps be more accurately translated if another word were substituted for 'have no fellowship with.' The original expression seems rather to mean, 'Do not go partners with other people in works of darkness, which it takes more than one to commit.' Or, to put it into another language, the Apostle is regarding Christian people here as members of society, and exhorting them to a certain course of conduct in reference to plain and palpable existing evils around them. And such an exhortation to the duty of plain abstinence from things that the opinion of the world around us has no objection to, but which are contrary to the light, is addressed to all Christian people.

The need of it I do not require to illustrate at any length. But let me remind you that the devil has no more cunning way of securing a long lease of life for any evil than getting Christian people and Christian Churches to give it their sanction. What was it that kept slavery alive for centuries? Largely, that Christian men solemnly declared that it was a divine institution. What is it that has kept war alive for all these centuries? Largely, that bishops and preachers have always been ready to bless colours, and to read a Christening service over a man-of-war—and, I suppose, to ask God that an eighty-ton gun might be blessed to smash our enemies to pieces, and not to blow our sailors to bits. And what is it that preserves the crying evils of our community, the immoralities, the drunkenness, the trade dishonesty, and all the other things that I do not need to remind you of in the pulpit? Largely this, that professing Christians are mixed up with them. If only the whole body of those who profess and call themselves Christians would shake their hands clear of all complicity with such things, they could not last. Individual responsibility for collective action needs to be far more solemnly laid to heart by professing Christians than ever it has been.

Nor need I remind you, I suppose, with what fatal effects on the Gospel and the Church itself all such complicity is attended. Even the companions of wrongdoers despise, whilst they fraternise with, the professing Christian who has no higher standard than their own. What was it that made the Church victorious over the combined forces of imperial persecution, pagan superstition, and philosophic speculation? I believe that among all the causes that a well-known historian has laid down for the triumph of Christianity, what was as powerful as—I was going to say even more than—the Gospel of peace and love which the Church proclaimed was the standard of austere morality which it held up to a world rotting in its own filth. And sure I am that wherever the Church says, 'So do not I, because of the fear of the Lord,' it will gain a power, and will be regarded with a possibly reluctant, but a very real, respect which no easy-going coming down to the level of popular moralities will ever secure for a silver-slippered Christianity. And so, brethren, I would say to you, Do not be afraid of the old name *Puritan*. Ignorant people use it as a scoff. It should be a crown of glory. 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.'

But how is this to be done? Well, of course, there is only one way of abstaining, and that is, to abstain. But there are a great many different ways of abstaining. Light is not fire. And the more that Christian people feel themselves bound to stand aloof from common evils, the more are they bound to see that they do it in the spirit of the Master, which is meekness. It is always an invidious position to take up. And if we take it up with any heat and temper, with any lack of moderation, with any look of ostentation of superior righteousness, or with any trace of the Boanerges spirit which says, 'Let us call down fire from heaven and consume them,' our testimony will be weakened, and the world will have a right to say to us, 'Jesus we know, and Paul we know; but who are ye?' 'Who made this man a judge and a divider over us?' 'In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves.'

III. Lastly, note the still harder Christian duty of vigorous protest.

The further duty beyond abstinence which the text enjoins is inadequately represented by our version, 'but rather reprove them.' For the word rendered in our version 'reprove' is the same which our Lord employed when He spoke of the mission of the Comforter as being to 'convince (or convict) the world of sin.' And it does not merely mean 'reprove,' but so to reprove as to produce the conviction which is the object of the reproof.

This task is laid on the shoulders of all professing Christians. A *silent* abstinence is not enough. No doubt, the best way, in some circumstances, to convict the darkness is to shine. Our holiness will convict sin of its ugliness. Our light will reveal the gloom. The presentation of a Christian life is the Christian man's mightiest weapon in his conflict with the world's evil. But that is not all. And if Christian people think that they have done all their duty, in regard to clamant and common iniquities, by simply abstaining from them and presenting a nobler example, they have yet to learn one very important chapter of their duty. A dumb Church is a dying Church, and it ought to be; for Christ has sent us here in order, amongst other things, that we may bring Christian principles to bear upon the actions of the community; and not be afraid to speak when we are called upon by conscience to do so.

Now I am not going to dwell upon this matter, but I want just to point out to you how, in the context here, there are two or three very important principles glanced at which bear upon it. And one of them is this, that one reason for speaking out is the very fact that the evils are so evil that a man is ashamed to speak about them. Did you ever notice this context, in which the Apostle, in the next verse to my text, gives the reason for his commandment to 'reprove' thus—'*For* it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret'? Did you ever hear of a fantastic tenderness for morality so very sensitive that it is not at all shocked when the immoral things are *done*, but glows with virtuous indignation when a Christian man speaks out about them? There are plenty of people nowadays who tell us that it is 'indelicate' and 'indecent' and 'improper,' and I do not know how much else, for a Christian teacher or minister to say a word about certain moral scandals. But they do not say anything about the immorality and the indelicacy and the indecency of doing them. Let us have done with that hypocrisy, brethren. I am arguing for no disregard for proprieties; I want all fitting reticence observed, and I do not wish indiscriminate rebukes to be flung at foul things; but it is too much to require that, by reason of the very inky cloud of filth that they fling up like cuttlefish, they should escape censure. Let us remember Paul's exhortation, and reprove *because* the things are too bad to be spoken about.

Further, note in the context the thought that the conviction of the darkness comes from the flashing upon it of the light. 'All things when they are reproved are made manifest by the light.' Which, being translated into other words, is this:—Be strong in your brave protest, because it only needs that the thing should be seen as it is, and called by its right name, in order to be condemned.

The Assyrians had a belief that if ever, by any chance, a demon saw himself in a mirror, he was frightened at his own ugliness and incontinently fled. And if Christian people would only hold up the mirror of Christian principle to the hosts of evil things that afflict our city and our country, they would vanish like ghosts at sunrise. They cannot stand the light, therefore let us cast the light upon them.

And do not forget the other final principle here, which is imperfectly represented by our translation. We ought to read, 'Whatever is made manifest is light.' Yes. In the physical world when light falls upon a thing, you see it because there is on it a surface of light. And in the moral world the intention of all this conviction is that the thing disclosed to be darkness should, in the very disclosure, cease to be dark, should forsake its nature and be transformed into light. Such transformation is not always the case. Alas! There are evil deeds on which the light falls, and it does nothing. But the purpose in all cases should be, and the issue in many will be, that the merciful conviction by the light will be followed by the conversion of darkness into light.

And so, dear brethren, I bring this text to your hearts, and lay it upon your consciences. We may not all be called upon to speak; we are all called upon to *be*. You can shine, and by shining show how dark the darkness is. The obligation is laid upon us all; the commandment still comes to every Christian which was given to the old prophet, 'Declare unto My people their transgression, and to the house of Jacob their sin.' A quaint old writer says that the presence of a saint 'hinders the devil of elbow room to do his tricks.' We can all rebuke sin by our righteousness, and by our shining reveal the darkness to itself. We do not walk as children of the light unless we keep ourselves from all connivance with works of darkness. and by all means at our disposal reprove and convict them. 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch no unclean thing, saith the Lord.'

PAUL'S REASONS FOR TEMPERANCE

'And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. 13. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. 14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. 15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil. 17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19. Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.'—EPH. v. 11-21.

THERE are three groups of practical exhortations in this passage, of which the first deals with the Christian as a reproving light in darkness; the second, with the

Christian life as wisdom in the midst of folly; and the third with Christian sobriety and inspiration as the true exhilaration in contrast with riotous drunkenness. Probably such intoxication was prevalent in Ephesus in connection with the worship of 'Diana of the Ephesians,' for Paul was not the man to preach vague warnings against vices to which his hearers were not tempted. An under-current of allusion to such orgies accompanying the popular cult may be discerned in his words.

These two preceding sets of precepts can only be briefly touched on now. They lead up to the third, and the second is built on the first by a 'therefore' (ver. 15). The Apostle has just been saying that Christians were 'darkness, but are now light in the Lord,' and thence drawing the law for their life, to walk as 'children of light.' A very important part of such walk is recoiling from all share in 'the unfruitful works of darkness,'—a significant expression branding such deeds as being both bad in their source and in their results. Dark doings have consequences tragic enough and certain enough, but they are barren of all such issues as correspond to men's obligations and capacities. Their outcome is like the growths on a tree, which are not fruit, but products of disease. There is no fruit grown in the dark; there is no worthy product from us unless Christ is our light. If He is, and we are therefore 'light in the Lord,' we shall 'reprove' or 'convict' the Christless life. Its sinfulness will be shown by the contrast with the Christ-life. A thunder-cloud never looks so lividly black as when smitten by sunshine.

Our lives ought to make evil things ashamed to show their ugly faces. Christians should be, as it were, the incarnate conscience of a community. The Apostle is not thinking so much of words as of deeds, though words are not to be withheld when needful. The agent of reproof is 'the light,' which here is the designation of character as transformed by Jesus, and the process of reproof or conviction is simply the manifestation of the evil in its true nature, which comes from setting it in the beams of the light. To show sin as it is, is to condemn it; 'for everything that is made manifest is light.' Observe that Paul here speaks of 'light,' not 'the light,'—that is, he is speaking now not of Christian character, which he had likened to light, but of physical light to which he had likened it, and is backing up his figurative statement as to the reproving and manifesting effects of the former, by the plain fact as to the latter, that, when daylight shines on anything, it is revealed, and, as it were, becomes light. He clenches his exhortation by quoting probably an early Christian hymn, which regards Christ as the great illuminator, ready to shine on all drowsy, dark souls as soon as they stir and rouse themselves from drugged and fatal sleep.

The second set of exhortations here is connected with the former by a 'therefore,' which refers to the whole preceding precept. Because the Christian is to shake himself free from complicity with works of darkness, and to be their living condemnation, he must take heed to his goings. A climber on a glacier has to look to his feet, or he will slip and fall down a crevasse, perhaps, from which he will never be drawn up. Heedlessness is folly in such a world as this. '"Don't care" comes to the gallows.' The temptation to 'go as you please' is strong in youth, and it is easy to scoff at 'cold-blooded folks who live by rule,' but they are the wise people, after all. A great element in that heedfulness is a quick insight into the special duty and opportunity of the moment, for life is not merely made up of hours, but each has its own particular errand for us, and has some possibility in it which, neglected, may be lost for ever.

The mystic solemnity of time is that it is made up of 'seasons.' We shall walk heedfully in the degree in which we are awake to the moment's meaning, and grasp opportunity by the forelock, or, as Paul says, 'buy up the opportunity.' But wise heed to our walk is not enough, unless we have a sure standard by which to regulate it. A man may take great care of his watch, but unless he can compare it with a chronometer, or, as they do in Edinburgh, pull out their watches when the one o'clock gun is fired on a signal from Greenwich, he may be far out and not know it. So the Apostle adds the one way to keep our lives right, and the one source of true, practical wisdom—the 'understanding what the will of the Lord is.' He will not go far wrong whose instinctive question, as each new moment, with its solemn, animating possibilities, meets him, is, 'What wilt Thou have me to do?' He will not be nearly right who does not first of all ask that.

Then Paul comes to his precept of temperance. It naturally flows from the preceding, inasmuch as a drunken man is as sure to be incapable of taking heed to his conduct as of walking straight. He reels in both. He is stone-blind to the meaning of the moments. He hears no call, though the 'voice of the trumpet' may be 'exceeding loud,' and as for understanding what the will of the Lord is, that is far beyond him. The intoxication of an hour or the habit of drinking makes obedience to the foregoing precepts impossible. This master vice carries all other vices in its pocket.

Paul makes a daring, and, as some would think, an irreverent, comparison, when he proposes being 'filled with the Spirit' as the Christian alternative or substitute to being 'drunken with wine.' But the daring comparison suggests deep truth. The spurious exhilaration, the loosening of the bonds of care, the elevation above the pettiness and monotony of daily life, which the drunkard seeks, and is degraded and deceived in proportion as he momentarily finds, are all ours, genuinely, nobly, and to our infinite profit, if we have our empty spirits filled with that Divine Life. That exhilaration does not froth away, leaving bitter dregs in the cup. That loosening of the bonds of care, and elevation above life's sorrows, does not flow from foolish oblivion of facts, nor end in their being again roughly forced on us. 'Riot' bellows itself hoarse, and is succeeded by corresponding depression; but the calm joys of the Spirit-filled spirit last, grow, and become calmer and more joyful every day.

The boisterous songs of boon companions are set in contrast with the Christian 'psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,' which were already in use, and a snatch from one of which Paul has just quoted. Good-fellowship tempts men to drink together, and a song is a shoeing-horn for a glass; but the *camaraderie* is apt to end in blows, and is a poor caricature of the bond knitting all who are filled with the Spirit to one another, and making them willing to serve one another. The roystering or maudlin geniality cemented by drink generally ends in quarrels, as everybody knows that the truculent stage of intoxication succeeds the effusively affectionate one. But they who have the Spirit in them, and not only 'live in the Spirit,' but 'walk in the Spirit,' esteem each the other better than themselves. In a word, to be filled with the Spirit is the way to possess all the highest forms of the good which men are tempted to intoxication to secure, and which in it they find only for a moment, and which is coarse and unreal.

SLEEPERS AT NOONDAY

'Wherefore He saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.'—EPH. v. 14.

THIS is the close of a short digression about 'light.' The 'wherefore' at the beginning of my text seems to refer to the whole of the verses that deal with that subject. It is as if the Apostle had said, 'I have been telling you about light and its blessed effects. Now I tell you how you may win it for yours. The condition on which it is to be received by men is that they awake and arise from the dead.'

'*He saith.*' Who? The speaker whose words are quoted is not named, but this is the common formula of quotation from the *Old Testament*. It is, therefore, probable that the word 'Creator' or 'God' is to be supplied. But there is no Old Testament passage which exactly corresponds to the words before us; the nearest approach to such being the ringing exhortation of the prophet to the Messianic Church, 'Arise! Shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.' And it is probable that the Apostle is here quoting, without much regard either to the original connection or the primary purpose of the word, a well-known old saying which seemed to him appropriately to fall in with the trend of his thoughts. Like other writers he often adorns his own words with the citation of those of others without being very careful as to whether he, in some measure, diverts these from their original intention. But the words of my text fairly represent the prophetic utterance, in so far as they echo the call to the sleepers to wake, and share the prophet's confidence that light is streaming out for all those whose eyes are opened.

The want of precise correspondence between our text and the prophetic passage has led some to suppose that we have here the earliest recorded fragment of a Christian hymn. It would be interesting if that were so, but the formula of citation seems to oblige us to look to Scripture for the source from which my text is taken. However, let us leave these thoughts, and come to the text itself. It is an earnest call from God. It describes a condition, peals forth a summons, and gives a promise. Let us listen to what 'He saith' in all these regards.

I. First of all, then, the condition of the persons addressed.

The two sad metaphors, *slumberers* and *dead*, are applied to the same persons. There must, therefore, be some latitude in the application of the figures and they must be confined in their interpretation to some one or more points in which sleep and death are alike.

Now we all know that, as the proverb says, 'sleep is the image of death.' And what is the point of comparison? Mainly this, that the sleeper and the corpse are alike unconscious of an external world, unable to receive impressions from it, or to put forth action on it; and there, as I take it, is especially the point which is in the Apostle's view.

The sleeper and the dead man alike are in the midst of an order of things of which they are all unaware. And you and I live in two worlds, one, this low, fleeting, material one; and the other the white, snowy peaks that girdle it as do the Alps the Lombard plains; and men live all unconscious of that which lies on their horizon. But the metaphor of a level ground encircled by mountains does not fully represent the closeness of the connection between these two worlds, of both of which every one of us is a denizen. For on all sides, pressing in upon us, enfolding us like an atmosphere, penetrating into all the material, underlying all which is visible, all of which has its roots in the unseen, is that world which the mass of men are in a conspiracy to ignore and forget. And just as the sleeper is unconscious of all around him in his chamber, and of all the stir and beauty of the world in which he lives, so the bulk of us go blind and darkling through life, absorbed in the things seen, and never lift even a momentary and lack-lustre glance to the august realities which lie behind these, and give them all their significance and beauty.

Yes; and just as in a dream men are busy with baseless phantoms that vanish and are forgotten, and seem to themselves to be occupied, whilst all the while they are lying prone and passive, so the mass of us are sleep-walkers. What are many men who will be hurrying on to the Manchester Exchange on Tuesday? What are they but men who are dreaming that they are at work, but are only at work on dreams which will vanish when the eyes are opened? Practical men, who are busy and absorbed with affairs and with the things of this present, curl their lips about 'idealists' of all sorts, be they idealists of thought, or of art, or of benevolence, or of religion, and call them dreamers.

The boot is on the other leg. It is the idealists that are awake, and it is you people that live for to-day, and have not learned that to-day is a little fragment and sliver of eternity—it is you who are dreamers, and all these things round about us—the solid-seeming realities—are illusions, and

> 'Like the bubbles on a river,
> Sparkling, bursting, borne away,'

they will disappear. There is only one reality, and that is God, and the only lives that lay hold of the substance are those which grasp Him. The rest of you are shadows hunting for shadows.

The two metaphors of my text coincide in suggesting another thing, and that is the awful contrast in the average life between what is in a man and what comes out of him. 'Dormant power,' we talk about Ah, how tragically the true man is dormant in all the work of worldly hearts! God has made a great mistake in making you what you are, if there is no place for you to exercise your powers in but this present world, and nothing to exercise them on except the things that pass and perish. Travellers in lands where civilisation used to be, and barbarism now is, find sculptured stones from temples turned into fences for cattle-sheds and walls round pigstyes. And that is something like what men do with the faculties that God has given them. Why, the best part of you, brother, if you are not a Christian, and living a Christian life—the best part of you is asleep, and it is only the lower nature of you that is awake! Sometimes the sleepers stir uneasily. It used to be said that earthquakes were caused by a giant rolling himself from side to side in his troubled slumber. And there are earthquakes in your heart and spirit caused by the half-waking of the dormant self, the true man, who is immersed and embruted in sense and the things of time. Some of you by earthly lusts, some of you by over-indulgence in fleshly appetites, eating and drinking and the like; some of you by absorption in the mere externals of trade and profession and occupation to the entire neglect of the inward thing which would glorify and exalt these—but all of us somehow, unless we are living for God, have lulled our best, true, central self into slumber, and lie as if dead.

Now, brethren, do not forget that this exhortation of my text, and therefore this description, is addressed to a community of professing Christians. I hope you will not misunderstand me as if I thought that such a picture as I have been trying to draw applies only to men that have no religion in them at all. It applies in varying degrees to men that have, as—I was going to say the bulk, but perhaps that is exaggeration, let me say a tragically large number—of professing Christians, and a proportionate number of the professing Christians in this audience have, a little life and a great circumference of death. Dear brethren, you may call yourselves, and may be Christian people, and have somewhat shaken off the torpor, and roused yourself from the slumbering death of which I have been speaking. Remember that it still hangs to you, and that it was of Christians that the Master said: 'Whilst the Lord was away they all slumbered and slept'; and that it was of a Christian Church, and not of a pagan world, that the same voice from heaven said: 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' And so I beseech you, bear with me, and do not think I am scolding, or flinging about wild words at random, when I make a very earnest appeal to each individual professing, and real, Christian in this congregation, and ask them to consider, each for themselves, how much of sleep is still in their drowsy eyes, and how far it is true that the quickening life of Jesus Christ has penetrated, as the sunbeams into the darkness, into the heavy mass of their natural death.

II. Secondly, let me ask you to look at the summons to awake.

It comes like the morning bugle to an army, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.' Now, I am not going to waste your time by talking about the old, well-worn, interminable, and unprofitable controversy as to God's part and man's in this awaking, but I do wish to insist upon this plain fact, that the command here presupposes upon our parts, whether we be Christian people or not, the ability to obey. God would not mock a man by telling him to do what he cannot do. And it is perfectly clear that the one attitude in which we may be sure of God's help to keep any of His commandments, and this amongst the rest, is when we are trying to keep them. 'Stretch out thy hand,' said Christ to the man whose disease was that he could not stretch it out. 'Arise and walk,' said Christ to the man whose lifelong sadness it was that his limbs had no power. 'Lazarus, come forth,' said Christ unto the dull, cold ear of death. And Lazarus heard, wherever he was, and, though his feet were tangled with the graveclothes, he came stumbling out, because the power to do what he was bid had come wrapped in the command to do it. And if these other two men had turned to Jesus and said, 'What is the use of telling me to stretch out my hand, or me to move my limbs? Thou knowest that I cannot,' they would have lain there paralysed till they died. But when they heard the command there came a tingling sense of new ability into the withered limb. 'And he stretched forth his hand, and it was restored whole as the other.' Ay, but the process of restoration began when he willed to stretch it out in obedience to the command, which was a promise as much as a command. So we need not trouble ourselves with the question how the dead man can arise, or how the sleeper can wake himself.

This, at all events, is clear, that if what I have been saying is true as to the main point in view in both the metaphors, viz. the unconsciousness of the unseen world, and the slumbering powers that we have within us, then the remedy for that *is* in our own hands. There are scarcely any limits to be put to a man's capacity of determining for himself what shall be the object of his thought, his interest, his affection, or his pursuits. You can withdraw your desires and contemplations from the intrusive and absorbing present. You can coerce yourselves to concentrate more thought than you do, more interest, affection, and effort than you have ever done, upon the things that are unseen. You can turn your gaze thither. You cannot directly and immediately regulate your feelings, but you can settle the thoughts which shall guide the feelings, and you can, and you *do*, fix for yourselves, though not consciously, the things which shall be uppermost in your regard, and supreme in the ordering of your life.

And so the commandment of my text is but this, 'Wake from the illusions; rouse yourselves to the contemplation of the things unseen and eternal. Let the Lord always be before your face.' And you will be awake and alive.

III. And so my last point is the promise of the morning light which gladdens the wakeful eye. 'Christ shall give thee light.'

Now, if the words of my text are an allusion to the prophecy to which I have already referred, it is striking to observe, though I cannot dwell upon the thought, that Paul here unhesitatingly ascribes to Jesus Christ an action which, in the source of his quotation, is ascribed to Jehovah. 'Arise, shine, for thy light has come, and the glory of *Jehovah* is risen upon thee,' says the prophet. 'Arise! thou that sleepest,' says Paul, 'and *Christ* shall give thee light.' As always, he regards his Lord as possessed of fully divine attributes; and he has learned the depth of the Master's own saying, 'Whatsoever things the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son *likewise*.' But I turn from that to the main point to be insisted upon here, that the Apostle is setting forth this as a certainty, that if a man will open his eyes he will have light enough. The sunshine is flooding the world. It falls upon the closed eyelids of the sleepers, and would fain gently lift them, that it might enter. A man needs nothing more than to shake off the slumber, and bring himself into the conscious presence of the unseen glories that surround us, in order to get light enough and to spare—whether you mean by light knowledge for guidance on the path of life, or whether you mean by it purity that shall scatter the darkness of evil from the heart, or whether you mean by it the joy that comes in the morning, radiant and fresh as the sunrise over the Eastern hills. 'Awake, and Christ *shall* give thee light.'

The miracle of Goshen is reversed, in the case of many of us, the land is flashing in the sunshine, but within our houses there is midnight darkness, not because there is not light around, but because the shutters are shut. Oh, brethren, it is a solemn thing to choose the darkness rather than the light. And you do that—though not consciously, and in so many words, making your election—by indifference, by neglect, by the direction of the main current of your thoughts and desires and aims to perishable things, and by the deeds that follow from such a disposition. These choose for you, and you, in effect, choose by them.

I beseech you, do not let Christ's own trumpet-call fall upon your ears, as if faint and far away, like the unwelcome summons that comes to a drowsy man in the morning. You know that if, having been called, he makes up his mind to lie a little longer, he is almost sure to fall more dead asleep than he was before. And if you hear, however dim, distantly, and through my poor words, Christ's voice saying to you, 'Awake! thou that sleepest,' do not neglect it. The only safe course is to spring up at once. If thou dost, 'Christ shall give thee light,' never fear. The light is all about you. You only need to open your eyes, and it will pour in. If you do not, you surround yourself with darkness that may be felt here, and ensures for yourself a horror of great darkness in the death hereafter.

REDEEMING THE TIME

'See, then, that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.'—EPH. v. 15, 16.

SOME of us have, in all probability, very little more 'time' to 'redeem.' Some of us have, in all probability, the prospect of many years yet to live. For both classes my text presents the best motto for another year. The most frivolous among us, I suppose, have some thoughts when we step across the conventional boundary that seems to separate the unbroken sequence of moments into periods; and as you in your business take stock and see how your accounts stand, so I would fain, for you and myself, make this a moment in which we may see where we are going, what we are doing, and how we are using this great gift of life.

My text gives us the true Christian view of time. It tells us what to do with it, and urges by implication certain motives for the conduct.

I. We have, first, what we ought to think about 'the time.'

There are two words in the New Testament, both of which are translated *time*, but they mean very different things. One of them, the more common, simply implies the succession of moments or periods; the other, which is employed here, means rather a definite portion of time to which some definite work or occurrence belongs. It is translated sometimes *season*, sometimes *opportunity*. Both these renderings occur in immediate proximity in the Epistle to the Galatians, where the Apostle says: 'As we have therefore opportunity let us do good to all men, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. . . .' And, again, it is employed side by side with the other word to which I have referred, in the Acts of the Apostles, where we read, 'It is not for you to know the times or the seasons'—the former word simply indicating the succession of moments, the latter word indicating epochs or crises to which special work or events belong.

And so here 'redeeming the *time*' does not merely mean making the most of moments, but means laying hold of, and understanding the special significance of, life as a whole, and of each succeeding instant of it as the season for some specific duty. It is not merely 'time,' it is '*the* time'; not merely the empty succession of beats of the pendulum, but these moralised, as it were, heightened, and having significance, because each is apprehended as having a special mission, and affording an opportunity for a special work.

Now, there are two aspects of that general thought, on each of which I would touch. The Apostle here uses the singular number, and speaks not of the times, but of 'the time'; as if the whole of life were an opportunity, a season for some one clear duty which manifestly belongs to it, and is meant to be done in it.

What is that? There are a great many ways of answering that question, but even more important perhaps than the way of answering is the mood of mind which asks it. If we could only get into this, as our habitual temper and disposition, asking ourselves what life is for, then we should have conquered nine-tenths of our temptations, and all but secured that we shall aim at the purpose which thus clearly and constantly shines before us. Oh! if I could get some of my friends here this morning, who have never really looked this solemn question in the face, to rise above the mere accidents of their daily occupations, and to take their orders, not from circumstances, or from the people whom they admire and imitate, but at first hand from considering what they really are here for, and why their days in their whole sweep are given them, I should not have spoken in vain. The sensualist answers the question in one way, the busy Manchester man in another, the careful, burdened mother in another, the student in another, the moralist in another. But all that is good in each answer is included in the wider one, that the end of life, the purpose for which 'the season' is granted us, is that 'we should glorify God and enjoy Him for ever.'

I do not care whether you say that the end for which we live is the salvation of our souls, or whether you put it in other words, and say that it is the cultivation and perfecting of a Christ-like and God-pleasing character, or whether you admit still another aspect, and say that it is the intention of time to prepare us for that which lies beyond time. Time is the lackey of eternity, and the chamberlain that opens the gates of the Kingdom of God. All these various answers are at bottom one. Life is ours mainly in order that, by faith in Jesus Christ, we should struggle, and do, and by struggles, by sorrows, and by all that befalls us, should grow liker Him, and so fitter for the calm joys of that place where the throb of the pendulum has ceased, and the hours are stable and eternal. We live here in order to get ready for living yonder. And we get ready for living yonder, when here we understand that every moment of life is granted us for the one purpose, which can be pursued through all life—viz. the becoming liker our dear Lord, and the drinking in to our own hearts more of His Spirit, and moulding our characters more in conformity with His image.

That is what my life and yours are given us for. If we succeed in that, we succeed all round. If we fail in that, whatever else we succeed in, we have failed altogether.

But then, remember, still further, the other aspect in which we can look at this thought. That ultimate, all-embracing end is reached through a multitude of nearer and intermediate ones. Whilst life, as a whole, is the season for learning to know and for possessing God, life is broken up into smaller portions and periods, each of which has some special duty appropriate to it and a 'lesson for the day.'

Now many of us, who entirely agree, theoretically, in saying that all life is granted for this highest purpose, go wrong here and fail to discern the significance of single moments. To-day is always commonplace; it is yesterday that is beautiful, and to-morrow that is full of possibilities, to the vulgar mind. But to-day is common and low. There are mountains ahead and mountains behind, purple with distance and radiant with sunshine, and the sky bends over them and seems to touch their crests. But here, on the spot where we stand, life seems flat and mean, and far away from the heavens. We admit the meaning of life taken altogether, but it is very hard to break up that recognition into fragments, and to feel the worth of these fleeting moments which, just because they are here, seem to be of small account. So we forget that life is only the aggregate of small present instants, and that the hour is sixty times sixty insignificant seconds, and the day twenty-four brief hours, and the year 365 commonplace days, and the life threescore years and ten. Brethren, carry your theoretical recognition of the greatness and solemnity of the purposes for which life has been given here into each of the moments of the passing day, and you will find that there is nothing so elastic as time; and that you can crowd into a day as much as a languid thousand years do sometimes hold, of sacrifice and service, of holy joys, and of likeness to Jesus Christ. He who has learned that all the moments are heavy with significance, and pregnant with immortal issues, he, too, in some measure may share in the prerogative of the timeless God, and to Him 'one day may be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.' It is not the beat of the pendulum or the tick of the clock that measure time, but it is the deeds which we crowd into it, and the feelings and thoughts which it ministers to us. This passing life draws all its importance from the boundless eternal issues to which it leads. Every little puddle on the paving-stones this morning, a quarter of an inch broad and a film deep, will be mirroring bright sunshine, and blue with the reflected heaven. And so we may make the little drop of our lives radiant with the image of God, and bright with the certainties of immortality.

II. Now, note secondly, how to make the most of the season.

'Redeeming the time,' says the Apostle. The figure is very simple and natural, and has only been felt to be difficult and obscure, because people have tried to ride the metaphor further than it was meant. The questions of who is the seller and what is the price do not enter into the Apostle's mind at all. Metaphors are not to be driven so far as that. We have to confine ourselves to the simple thought that there is a need for making the opportunity which is given truly our own; and that that can only be done by giving something in exchange for it. That is the notion of purchase, is it not? Acquisition, by giving something else. Thus, says Paul, you have to buy the opportunity which time affords us.

That is to say, to begin with, life gives us opportunities and no more. We *may*, in and through it, become wise, good, pure, happy, noble, Christ-like, or we may not. The opportunity is there, swinging, as it were, *in vacuo*. Lay hold of it, says he, and turn it into more than an opportunity—even an actuality and a fact.

And how is that to be done? We have to give something away, if we get the opportunity for our very own. What have we to give away? Well, mainly the lower ends for which the moment might serve. These have to be surrendered—sometimes abandoned altogether, always rigidly restricted and kept in utter subordination to the highest purposes. To-day is given us mainly that we may learn to know God better, and to love Him more, and to serve Him more joyfully. Our daily duties are given us for the same purpose. But if we go about them without thinking of God or the highest ends which life is meant to serve, then we shall certainly lose the highest ends, and an opportunity will go past us unimproved. But if, on the other hand, whilst we follow our daily business for the sake of legitimate temporal gain, we see, above that, the aspect of daily life as educating in all Christian nobleness and lofty thoughts and purposes, then we shall have given away the lower ends for the sake of attaining the higher. You live, suppose, to found a business, to become masters of your trade, to gain wisdom and knowledge, to establish for yourselves a position amongst your fellow-men, to cultivate your character so as to grow in wisdom and purity, apart from God. Or you live in order to win affection and move thankfully in the heaven of loving associations in your home, amongst your children. Or you live for the sake of carrying some lower but real good amongst men. Many of these ends are beautiful and noble, and necessary for the cultivation and discharge of the various duties and relationships of life; but unless they are all kept secondary, and there towers above them this other, life is wasted. If life is not to be wasted, they must be bartered for the higher, and we must recognise that to give all things for the sake of Christ and His love is wise merchandise and good exchange. 'What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea! doubtless, and I count all things but loss that I may win Him and be found of Him.' You must barter the lower if you are to secure the higher ends for which life is the appointed season.

And then, still more minutely, my text gives us another suggestion about this 'redeeming the time.' 'See, then,' says the Apostle, 'that ye walk circumspectly.' The word rendered circumspectly might better, perhaps, be translated in some such way as 'strictly,' 'rigidly,' 'accurately,' 'punctiliously.' As I take it, it is to be connected with the 'walk,' and not with the 'see, then,' as the Revised Version does.

So here is a practical direction, walk strictly, accurately, looking to your feet; as a man would do who was upon what they call in the Alps an *arrête.* Suppose a narrow ridge of snow piled on the top of a ledge of rock, with a precipice of 5000 feet on either side, and a cornice of snow hanging over empty space. The climber puts his alpenstock before his foot, he tests with his foot before he rests his weight, for a false step and down he goes!

'See that you walk circumspectly,' rigidly, accurately, punctiliously. Live by law—that is to say, live by principles which imply duties; for to live by inclination is ruin. The only safety is, look to your feet and look to your road, and restrain yourselves, 'and so redeem the time.'

There is something else to look to. Feet? Yes! Road? Yes! But also look to your guide. Tread in Christ's footsteps, 'follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.' Make Him the pattern and example, and then you shall walk safely; and the path will carry you right into 'His presence where there is fulness of joy.' No great, noble, right, blessed life is lived without rigid self-control, self-denial, and self-crucifixion. Do not fancy that that means the absence of joy and spontaneity. 'I will walk at liberty for I keep Thy precepts.' Hedges are blessings when, on the other side, there are bottomless swamps of poisonous miasma, into which if a man ventures he will either drown or be plague-stricken. The narrow way that leads to life is the way of peace, just because it is a way of restrictions. Better to walk on the narrowest path that leads to the City than to be chartered libertines, wandering anywhere at our own bitter wills, and finding 'no end, in devious mazes lost.' Freedom consists in obeying from the heart the restriction of love; and walking punctiliously.

III. Lastly, note the motives for this course.

The Apostle says, 'see that ye walk strictly, not as fools but as wise.' That is to say, such limitation, which buys the opportunity and uses it for the highest purposes, is the only true wisdom. If you take the mean, miserable, partial, fleeting purposes for which some of us, alas, are squandering our lives, and contrast these with the great, perfect, all-satisfying, blessed, and eternal end for which it was given us, how can we escape being convicted of folly? One day, dear friends, it will be found out that the virgins that were not ready when the Lord came were the foolish ones. One day it will be asked of you and of me, 'What did you do with the life which I gave you, that you might know Me?' And if we have only the answer, 'O Lord! I founded a big business in Manchester—I made a fortune—I wrote a clever book, that was most favourably reviewed—I brought up a family'—the only thing fit to be said to us is, 'Thou fool!' The only wisdom is the wisdom that secures the end for which life was given.

Then there is another motive here. 'Redeeming the time *because* the days are evil.' That is singular. 'The days' are 'the time,' and yet they are 'evil' days, which being translated into other words is just this—we are to make a definite effort to keep in view, and to effect, the purposes for which all the days of our lives are given us, because these days have in themselves a tendency to draw us away from the true path and to blind us as to their real meaning. The world is full of possibilities of good and evil, and the same day which, in one aspect, is the 'season' for serving God is, in another aspect, an 'evil' day which may draw us away from Him. And if we do not put out manly effort, it certainly will do so. The ocean is meant to bear the sailor to his port, but from the waves rise up fair forms, siren voices, with sweet harps and bright eyes that tempt the weary mariner to his destruction. And the days which may be occasions for our getting nearer God, if we let them work their will upon us, will be evil days which draw us away from Him.

Let me add one last motive which is not stated in my text, but is involved in the very idea of *opportunity* or *season*—viz. that the time for the high and noble purposes of which I have been speaking is rigidly limited and bounded; and once past is irrevocable. The old, wise mythological story tells us that Occasion is bald behind, and is to be grasped by the forelock. The moment that is past had in it wonderful possibilities for us. If we did not grasp them with promptitude and decision they have gone for ever. You may as well try to bring back the water that has been sucked over Niagara, and churned into white foam at its base, as to recall the wasted opportunities. They stand all along the course of our years, solemn monuments of our unfaithfulness, and none of them can ever return again. Life is full of too-lates; that sad sound that moans through the roofless ruins of the past, like the wind through some deserted temple. 'Too late, too late; ye cannot enter now.' 'The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore he shall beg in harvest and have nothing.' Oh! let us see to it that we wring out of the passing moments their highest possibilities of noblest good. Let us begin to live; for only he who lives to God really lives. Life is given to us that we may know Jesus Christ—trust Him, love Him, serve Him, be like Him. That is the pearl which, if we bring up from the sea of time, we shall not have been cast in vain into its stormy waves. Do you take care that this new year which is dawning upon us go not to join the many wasted years that lie desolate behind us, but let us all see to it that the flood which sweeps us and it away bears us straight to God, Who is our home. 'Now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation.'

‘THE PANOPLY OF GOD

‘Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.’—EPH. vi. 13.

THE military metaphor of which this verse is the beginning was obviously deeply imprinted on Paul's mind. It is found in a comparatively incomplete form in his earliest epistle, the first to the Thessalonians, in which the children of the day are exhorted to put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. It reappears, in a slightly varied form, in the Epistle to the Romans, where those whose salvation is nearer than when they believed, are exhorted, because the day is at hand, to cast off, as it were, their night-gear, and to put on the ‘armour of light’; and here, in this Epistle of the Captivity, it is most fully developed. The Roman legionary, to whom Paul was chained, here sits all unconsciously for his portrait, every detail of which is pressed by Paul into the service of his vivid imagination; the virtues and graces of the Christian character, which are ‘the armour of light,’ are suggested to the Apostle by the weapon which the soldier by his side wore. The vulgarest and most murderous implements assume a new character when looked upon with the eyes of a poet and a Christian. Our present text constitutes the general introduction to the great picture which follows, of ‘the panoply of God.’

I. We must be ready for times of special assaults from evil.

Most of us feel but little the stern reality underlying the metaphor, that the whole Christian life is warfare, but that in that warfare there are crises, seasons of special danger. The interpretation which makes the 'evil day' co-extensive with the time of life destroys the whole emphasis of the passage: whilst all days are days of warfare, there will be, as in some prolonged siege, periods of comparative quiet; and again, days when all the cannon belch at once, and scaling ladders are reared on every side of the fortress. In a long winter there are days sunny and calm followed, as they were preceded, by days when all the winds are let loose at once. For us, such times of special danger to Christian character may arise from temporal vicissitudes. Joy and prosperity are as sure to occasion them as are sorrows, for to Paul the 'evil day' is that which especially threatens moral and spiritual character, and these may be as much damaged by the bright sunshine of prosperity as by the midwinter of adversity, just as fierce sunshine may be as fatal as killing frost. They may also arise, without any such change in circumstances, from some temptation coming with more than ordinary force, and directed with terrible accuracy to our weakest point.

These evil days are ever wont to come on us suddenly; they are heralded by no storm signals and no falling barometer. We may be like soldiers sitting securely round their camp fire, till all at once bullets begin to fall among them. The tiger's roar is the first signal of its leap from the jungle. Our position in the world, our ignorance of the future, the heaped-up magazines of combustibles within, needing only a spark, all lay us open to unexpected assaults, and the temptation comes stealthily, 'as a thief in the night.' Nothing is so certain as the unexpected. For these reasons, then, because the 'evil day' will certainly come, because it may come at any time, and because it is most likely to come 'when we look not for it,' it is the dictate of plain common sense to be prepared. If the good man of the house had known at what hour the thief would have come, he would have watched; but he would have been a wiser man if he had watched all the more, because he did *not* know at what hour the thief would come.

II. To withstand these we must be armed against them before they come.

The main point of the exhortation is this previous preparation. It is clear enough that it is no time to fly to our weapons when the enemy is upon us. Aldershot, not the battlefield, is the place for learning strategy. Belshazzar was sitting at his drunken feast while the Persians were marching on Babylon, and in the night he was slain. When great crises arise in a nation's history, some man whose whole life has been preparing him for the hour starts to the front and does the needed work. If a sailor put off learning navigation till the wind was howling and a reef lay ahead, his corpse would be cast on the cruel rocks. It is well not to be 'over-exquisite,' to cast the fashion of 'uncertain evils,' but certain ones cannot be too carefully anticipated, nor too sedulously prepared for.

The manner in which this preparation is to be carried out is distinctly marked here. The armour is to be put on before the conflict begins. Now, without anticipating what will more properly come in considering subsequent details, we may notice that such a previous assumption implies mainly two things—a previous familiarity with God's truth, and a previous exercise of Christian virtues. As to the former, the subsequent context speaks of taking the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and of having the

When

loins girt with truth, which may be objective truth. As to the latter, we need not elaborate the Apostle's main thought that resistance to sudden temptations is most vigorous when a man is accustomed to goodness. One of the prophets treats it as being all but impossible that they who have been accustomed to evil shall learn to do well, and it is at least not less impossible that they who have been accustomed to do well shall learn to do evil. Souls which habitually walk in the clear spaces of the bracing air on the mountains of God will less easily be tempted down to the shut-in valleys where malaria reigns. The positive exercise of Christian graces tends to weaken the force of temptation. A mind occupied with these has no room for it. Higher tastes are developed which makes the poison sweetness of evil unsavoury, and just as the Israelites hungered for the strong, coarse-smelling leeks and garlic of Egypt, and therefore loathed 'this light bread,' so they whose palates have been accustomed to manna will have little taste for leeks and garlic. The mental and spiritual activity involved in the habitual exercise of Christian virtues will go far to make the soul unassailable by evil. A man, busily occupied, as the Apostle would have us to be, may be tempted by the devil, though less frequently the more he is thus occupied; but one who has no such occupations and interests tempts the devil. If our lives are inwardly and secretly honeycombed with evil, only a breath will be needed to throw down the structure. It is possible to become so accustomed to the calm delights of goodness, that it would need a moral miracle to make a man fall into sin.

Preparedness

III. To be armed with this armour, we must get it from God.

Prayer

Though it consists mainly of habitudes and dispositions of our own minds, none the less have we to receive these from above. It is 'the panoply of God,' therefore we are to be endued with it, not by exercises in our own strength, but by dependence on Him. In old days, before a squire was knighted, he had to keep a vigil in the chapel of the castle, and through the hours of darkness to watch his armour and lift his soul to God, and we shall never put on the armour of light unless in silence we draw near to Him who teaches our hands to war and our fingers to fight. Communion with Christ, and only communion with Christ, receives from Him the life which enables us to repel the diseases of our spirits. What He imparts to those who thus wait upon Him, and to them only, is the Spirit which helps their infirmities and clothes their undefended nakedness with a coat of mail. If we go forth to war with evil, clothed and armed only with what we can provide, we shall surely be worsted in the fray. If we go forth into the world of struggle from the secret place of the Most High, 'no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper,' and we shall be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

But waiting on God to receive our weapons from Him is but part of what is needful for our equipment. It is we who have to gird our loins and put on the breastplate, and shoe our feet, and take the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. The cumbrous armour of old days could only be put on by the help of another pulling straps, and fixing buckles, and lifting and bracing heavy shields on arms, and fastening helmets upon heads; but we have, by our own effort, to clothe ourselves with God's great gift, which is of no use to us, and is in no real sense ours, unless we do. It takes no small effort to keep ourselves in the attitude of dependence and receptivity, without which none of the great gifts of God come to us, and, least of all, the habitual practice of Christian virtues. The soldier who rushed into the fight, leaving armour and arms huddled together on the ground, would soon fall, and God's giving avails nothing for our defence unless there is also our taking. It is the woful want of taking the things that are freely given to us of God, and of making our own what by His gift is our own, that is mainly responsible for the defeats of which we are all conscious. Looking back on our own evil days, we must all be aware that our defeats have mainly come from one or other of the two errors which lie so near us all, and which are intimately connected with each other—the one being that of fighting in our own strength, and the other being that of leaving unused our God-given power.

IV. The issue of successful resistance is increased firmness of footing.

If we are able to 'withstand in the evil day,' we shall 'stand' more securely when the evil day has stormed itself away. If we keep erect in the shock of battle, we shall stand more secure when the wild charge has been beaten back. The sea hurls tons of water against the slender lighthouse on the rock, and if it stands, the smashing of the waves consolidates it. The reward of firm resistance is increased firmness. As the Red Indians used to believe that the strength of the slain enemies whom they had scalped passed into their arms, so we may have power developed by conflict, and we shall more fully understand, and more passionately believe in, the principles and truths which have served us in past fights. David would not wear Saul's armour because, as he said, 'I have not proved it,' and the Christian who has come victoriously through one struggle should be ready to say, 'I have proved it'; we have the word of the Lord, which is *tried*, to trust to, and not we only, but generations, have tested it, and it has stood the tests. Therefore, it is not for us to hesitate as to the worth of our weapons, or to doubt that they are more than sufficient for every conflict which we may be called upon to wage.

The text plainly implies that all our life long we shall be in danger of sudden assaults. It does contemplate victory in the evil day, but it also contemplates that after we have withstood, we have still to stand and be ready for another attack to-morrow. Our life here is, and must still be, a continual warfare. Peace is not bought by any victories; 'There is no discharge in that war.' Like the ten thousand Greeks who fought their way home through clouds of enemies from the heart of Asia, we are never safe till we come to the mountain-top, where we can cry, 'The Sea!' But though all our paths lead us through enemies, we have Jesus, who has conquered them all, with us, and our hearts should not fail so long as we can hear His brave voice encouraging us: 'In the world ye have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.'

End

'THE GIRDLE OF TRUTH'

'Stand, therefore, having girded your loins with truth.'—EPH. vi. 14 (R.V.).

THE general exhortation here points to the habitual attitude of the Christian soldier. However many conflicts he may have waged, he is still to be ever ready for fresh assaults, for in regard to them he may be quite sure that to-morrow will bring its own share of them, and that the evil day is never left behind so long as days still last. That general exhortation is followed by clauses which are sometimes said to be cotemporaneous with it, and to be definitions of the way in which it is to be accomplished, but they are much rather statements of what is to be done before the soldier takes his stand. He is to be fully equipped first: he is to take up his position second. We may note that, in all the list of his equipment, there is but one weapon of offence—the sword of the Spirit; all the rest are defensive weapons. The girdle, which is the first specified, is not properly a weapon at all, but it comes first because the belt keeps all the other parts of the armour in place, and gives agility to the wearer. Having girded your loins (R.V.) is better than having your loins girded (A.V.), as bringing out more fully that the assumption of the belt is the soldier's own doing.

I. We must be braced up if we are to fight.

Concentration and tension of power is an absolute necessity for any effort, no matter how poor may be the aims to which it is directed, and what is needed for the successful prosecution of the lowest transient successes will surely not be less indispensable in the highest forms of life. If a poor runner for a wreath of parsley or of laurel cannot hope to win the fading prize unless all his powers are strained to the uttermost, the Christian athlete has still more certainly to run, so as the racer has to do, 'that he may obtain.' Loose-flowing robes are caught by every thorn by the way, and a soul which is not girded up is sure to be hindered in its course. 'This one thing I do' is the secret of all successful doing, and obedience to the command of Jesus, 'let your loins be girded about,' is indispensable, if we would avoid polluting contact with evil. His other command associated with it will never be accomplished without it. The lamps will not be burning unless the loins are girt. The men who scatter their loves and thoughts over a wide space, and to whom the discipline which confines their energies within definite channels is distasteful, are destined to be failures in the struggle of life. It is better to have our lives running between narrow banks, and so to have a scour in the stream, than to have them spreading wide and shallow, with no driving force in all the useless expanse. Such concentration and bracing of oneself up is needful, if any of the rest of the great exhortations which follow are to be fulfilled.

It may be that Paul here has haunting his memory our Lord's words which we have just quoted; and, in any case, he is in beautiful accord with his brother Peter, who begins all the exhortations of his epistle with the words, 'Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, be sober, and set your minds perfectly upon the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Peter, indeed, is not thinking of the soldier's belt, but he is, no doubt, remembering many a time when, in the toils of the fishing-boat, he had to tighten his robes round his waist to prepare for tugging at the oar, and he feels that such concentration is needful if a Christian life is ever to be sober, and to have its hope set perfectly on Christ and His grace.

II. The girdle is to be truth.

The question immediately arises as to whether truth here means objective truth—the truth of the Gospel, or subjective truth, or, as we are accustomed to say, truthfulness. It would seem that the former signification is rather included in the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, and it is best to regard the phrase 'with (literally "in") truth' here as having its ordinary meaning, of which we may take as examples the phrases, 'the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth'; 'love rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth'; 'whom I love in truth.' Absolute sincerity and transparent truthfulness may well be regarded as the girdle which encloses and keeps secure every other Christian grace and virtue.

We do not need to go far to find a slight tinge of unreality marring the Christian life: we have only to scrutinise our own experiences to detect some tendency to affectation, to saying a little more than is quite true, even in our sincerest worship. And we cannot but recognise that in all Christian communities there is present an element of conventionalism in their prayers, and that often the public expression of religious emotions goes far beyond the realities of feeling in the worshippers. In fact, terrible as the acknowledgment may be, we shall be blind if we do not recognise that the average Christianity of this day suffers from nothing more than it does from the lack of this transparent sincerity, and of absolute correspondence between inward fact and outward expression. Types of Christianity which make much of emotion are, of course, specially exposed to such a danger, but those which make least of it are not exempt, and we all need to lay to heart, far more seriously than we ordinarily do, that God 'desires truth in the outward parts.' The sturdy English moralist who proclaimed 'Clear your mind of cant' as the first condition of attaining wisdom, was not so very far from Paul's point of view in our text.

but his exhortation covered but a small section of the Apostle's.

This absolute sincerity is hard to attain, and still harder to retain. Hideous as the fact of posing or attitudinising in our religion may be, it is one that comes very easily to us all, and, when it comes, spreads fast and spoils everything. Just as the legionary's armour was held in its place by the girdle, and if that worked loose or was carelessly fastened, the breastplate would be sure to get out of position, so all the subsequent graces largely depend for their vigorous exercise on the prime virtue of truthfulness. Righteousness and faith will be weakened by the fatal taint of insincerity, and, on the other hand, conscious truthfulness will give strength to the whole man. Braced up and concentrated, our powers for all service and for all conflict will be increased. 'The bond of perfectness' is, no doubt, 'Love,' but that perfect bond will not be worn by us, unless we have girded our loins with truthfulness.

It may be that in Paul's memory there is floating Isaiah's great vision of the 'Branch' out of the stock of Jesse, on whom the Spirit of the Lord was to rest, and on whom it was proclaimed that faithfulness (or as it is rendered in the Septuagint, by the same phrase which the Apostle here employs, 'in truth') was to be the girdle of his reins; but, at all events, that which the prophet saw to be in the ideal Messiah, the Apostle sees as essential to all the subjects of that King.

III. Our truthfulness is the work of God's truth.

We have already pointed out that the expression in the text may either be taken as referring to the subjective quality of truthfulness, or to the objective truth of God as contained in the Gospel, but these two interpretations may be united, for the main factor in producing the former is the faithful use of the latter and an honest submission to its operation. The Psalmist of old had learned that the great safeguard against sin was the resolve, 'Thy word have I hid in my heart.' That word brings to bear the mightiest motives that can sway life. It moves by love, by fear, by hope: it proposes the loftiest aim, even to imitate God as dear children; it gives clear directions, and draws straight and plain the pilgrim's path; it holds out the largest promises, and in a measure fulfils them, even in the narrowest and most troubled lives. If we have made God's truth our own, and are faithfully applying it to the details of daily life and submitting our whole selves to its operation, we shall be truthful and shall instinctively shrink from all unreality. If we know the truth as it is in Jesus, and walk in it, that 'truth will make us free,' and if thus 'we are in Him that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ,' that truth abiding in us, and with us, for ever, will make us truthful. In a heart so occupied and filled there is no room for the make-believes which are but too apt to creep into religious experience. Such a soul will recoil with an instinct of abhorrence from all that savours of ostentation, and will feel that its truest treasure cannot be shown. It is our duty not to hide God's righteousness within our hearts, but it is equally our duty to hide His word there. We have to seek to make manifest the 'savour of His knowledge in every place,' but we have also to remember that in our hearts there is a secret place, and that 'not easily forgiven are they who draw back the curtains,' and let a careless world look in. It is not for others to pry into the hidden mysteries of the fellowship of a soul with the indwelling Christ, however it may be the Christian duty to show to all and sundry the blessed and transforming effects of that fellowship.

But God's truth must be received and its power submitted to, if it is to implant in us the supreme grace of perfect truthfulness. Our minds and hearts must be saturated with it by many an hour of solitary reflection, by meditation which will diffuse its aroma like a fragrant perfume through our characters, and by the habit of bringing all circumstances, moods, and desires to be tested by its infallible criterion, and by the unreluctant acceptance of its guidance at every moment of our lives. There are many of us who, in a real though terribly imperfect sense, hold the truth, but who know nothing, or next to nothing, of its power to make us truthful. If it is to be of any use to us, we must make it ours in a far deeper sense than it is ours now; for many of us the girdle has been but carelessly fastened and has worked loose, and because, by our own faults, we have not 'abode in the truth,' it has come to pass that there is 'no truth in us.' We have set before us in the text the one condition on which all Christian progress depends, and if by any slackness we loosen the girdle of truthfulness, and admit into our religious life any taint of unreality, if our prayers say just a little more than is quite true, and our penitence a little less, we shall speedily find that hypocrisy and trivial insincerity are separated by very narrow limits. God's truth in the Gospel cleanses the inner man, but not without his own effort, and, therefore, we are commanded to 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness, in the fear of the Lord.'

‘THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS’

‘Having put on the breastplate of righteousness.’—EPH. vi. 14.

THERE can be no doubt that in this whole context the Apostle has in mind the great passage in Isaiah lix. where the prophet, in a figure of extreme boldness, describes the Lord as arming Himself to deliver the oppressed faithful, and coming as a Redeemer to Zion. In that passage the Lord puts on righteousness as a breastplate—that is to say, God, in His manifestation of Himself for the deliverance of His people, comes forth as if arrayed in the glittering armour of righteousness. Paul does not shrink from applying the same metaphor to those who are to be ‘imitators of God as beloved children,’ and from urging upon them that, in their humble degree and lowly measure, they too are to be clothed in the bright armour of moral rectitude. This righteousness is manifested in character and in conduct, and as the breastplate guards the vital organs from assault, it will keep the heart unwounded.

We must note that Paul here gathers up the whole sum of Christian character and conduct into one word. All can be expressed, however diversified may be the manifestations, by the one sovereign term ‘righteousness,’ and that is not merely a hasty generalisation, or a too rapid synthesis. As all sin has one root and is generically one, so all goodness is at bottom one. The germ of sin is living to oneself: the germ of goodness is living to God. Though the degrees of development of either opposite are infinite, and the forms of its expression innumerable, yet the root of each is one.

Paul thinks of righteousness as existent before the

Christian soldier puts it on. In this thought we are not merely relying on the metaphor of our text, but bringing it into accord with the whole tone of New Testament teaching, which knows of only one way in which any soul that has been living to self, and therefore to sin, can attain to living to God, and therefore can be righteous. We must receive, if we are ever to possess, the righteousness which is of God, and which becomes ours through Jesus Christ. The righteousness which shines as a fair but unattainable vision before sinful men, has a real existence, and may be theirs. It is not to be self-elaborated, but to be received.

That existent righteousness is to be put on. Other places of Scripture figure it as the robe of righteousness; here it is conceived of as the breastplate, but the idea of assumption is the same. It is to be put on, primarily, by faith. It is given in Christ to simple belief. He that hath faith thereby has the righteousness which is through faith in Christ, for in his faith he has the one formative principle of reliance on God, which will gradually refine character and mould conduct into whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. That righteousness which faith receives is no mere forensic treating of the unjust as just, but whilst it does bring with it pardon and oblivion from past transgressions, it makes a man in the depths of his being righteous, however slowly it may afterwards transform his conduct. The faith which is a departure from all reliance on works of righteousness which we have done, and is a single-eyed reliance on the work of Jesus Christ, opens the heart in which it is planted to all the influences of that life which was in Jesus, that from Him it may be in us. If Christ be in us (and if He is not, we are none of His), 'the spirit is life because of righteousness,' however the body may still be 'dead because of sin.'

But the putting on of the breastplate requires effort as well as faith, and effort will be vigorous in the measure in which faith is vivid, but it should follow, not precede or supplant, faith. There is no more hopeless and weary advice than would be the exhortation of our text if it stood alone. It is a counsel of despair to tell a man to put on that breastplate, and to leave him in doubt where he is to find it, or whether he has to hammer it together by his own efforts before he can put it on. There is no more unprofitable expenditure of breath than the cry to men, Be good! Be good! Moral teaching without Gospel preaching is little better than a waste of breath.

This injunction is continuously imperative upon all Christian soldiers. They are on the march through the enemy's country, and can never safely lay aside their armour. After all successes, and no less after all failures, we have still to arm ourselves for the fight, and it is to be remembered that the righteousness of which Paul speaks differs from common earthly moralities only as including and transcending them all. It is, alas, too true that Christian righteousness has been by Christians set forth as something fantastic and unreal, remote from ordinary life, and far too heavenly-minded to care for common virtues. Let us never forget that Jesus Himself has warned us, that except our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The greater orbit encloses the lesser within itself.

The breastplate of righteousness is our defence against evil. The opposition to temptation is best carried on by the positive cultivation of good. A habit of righteous conduct is itself a defence against temptation. Untilled fields bear abundant weeds. The used tool does not rust, nor the running water gather scum. The robe of righteousness will guard the heart as effectually as a coat of mail. The positive employment with good weakens temptation, and arms us against evil. But so long as we are here our righteousness must be militant, and we must be content to live ever armed to meet the enemy which is always hanging round us, and watching for an opportunity to strike. The time will come when we shall put off the breastplate and put on the fine linen 'clean and white,' which is the heavenly and final form of the righteousness of Saints.

A SOLDIER'S SHOES

'Your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.'—EPH. vi. 15.

PAUL drew the first draft of this picture of the Christian armour in his first letter. It is a finished picture here. One can fancy that the Roman soldier to whom he was chained in his captivity, whilst this letter was being written, unconsciously sat for his likeness, and that each piece of his accoutrements was seized in succession by the Apostle's imagination and turned to a Christian use. It is worth noticing that there is only one offensive weapon mentioned—'the sword of the Spirit.' All the rest are defensive—helmet, breastplate, shield, girdle, and shoes. That is to say, the main part of our warfare consists in defence, in resistance, and in keeping what we have, in spite of everybody, men and devils, who attempt to take it from us. 'Hold fast that thou hast; let no man take thy crown.'

Now, it seems to me that the ordinary reader does not quite grasp the meaning of our text, and that it would be more intelligible if, instead of 'preparation,' which means the process of getting a thing ready, we read 'preparedness,' which means the state of mind of the man who is ready. Then we have to notice that the little word 'of' does duty to express two different relations, in the two instances of its use here. In the first case—'the preparedness of the Gospel'—it states the origin of the thing in question. That condition of being ready comes from the good news of Christ. In the second case—'the Gospel of peace'—it states the result of the thing in question. The good news of Christ gives peace. So, taking the whole clause, we may paraphrase it by saying that the preparedness of spirit, the alacrity which comes from the possession of a Gospel that sheds a calm over the heart and brings a man into peace with God, is what the Apostle thinks is like the heavy hob-nailed boots that the legionaries wore, by which they could stand firm, whatever came against them.

I. The first thing that I would notice here is that the Gospel brings peace.

I suppose that there was ringing in Paul's head some echoes of the music of Isaiah's words, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth good tidings of good!' But there is a great deal more than an unconscious quotation of ancient words here; for in Paul's thought, the one power which brings a man into harmony with the universe and to peace with himself, is the power which proclaims that God is at peace with him. And Jesus Christ is our peace, because He has swept away the root and bitter fountain of all the disquiet of men's hearts, and all their chafing at providences — the consciousness that there is discord between themselves and God. The Gospel brings peace in the deepest sense of that word, and, primarily, peace with God, from out of which all other kinds of tranquillity and heart-repose do come—and they come from nothing besides.

But what strikes me most here is not so much the allusion to the blessed truth that was believed and experienced by these Ephesian Christians, that the Gospel brought peace, and was the only thing that did, as the singular emergence of that idea that the Gospel was a peace-bringing power, in the midst of this picture of fighting. Yes, it brings both. It brings us peace first, and then it says to us, 'Now, having got peace in your heart, because peace with God, go out and fight to keep it.' For, if we are warring with the devil we are at peace with God; and if we are at peace with the devil we are warring with God. So the two states of peace and war go together. There is no real peace which has not conflict in it, and the Gospel *is* 'the Gospel of peace,' precisely because it enlists us in Christ's army and sends us out to fight Christ's battles.

So, then, dear brother, the only way to realise and preserve 'the peace of God which passes understanding' is to fling ourselves manfully into the fight to which all Christ's soldiers are pledged and bound. The two conditions, though they seem to be opposite, will unite; for this is the paradox of the Christian life, that in all regions it makes compatible apparently incompatible and contradictory emotions. 'As sorrowful'—and Paul might have said 'therefore' instead of 'yet'—'as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as having nothing yet'—therefore—'possessing all things'; as in the thick of the fight, and yet kept in perfect peace, because the soul is stayed on God. The peace that comes from friendship with Him, the peace that fills a heart tranquil because satisfied, the peace that soothes a conscience emptied of all poison and robbed of all its sting, the peace that abides because, on all the horizon in front of us nothing can be seen that we need to be afraid of—that peace is the peace which the Gospel brings, and it is realised in warfare and is consistent with it. All the armies of the world may camp round the fortress, and the hurtling noise of battle may be loud in the plains, but up upon the impregnable cliff crowned by its battlements there is a central citadel, with a chapel in the heart of it; and to the worshippers there none of the noise ever penetrates. The Gospel which laps us in peace and puts it in our hearts makes us soldiers.

II. Further, this Gospel of peace will prepare us for the march.

A wise general looks after his soldiers' boots. If they give out, nothing else is of much use. The roads are very rough and very long, and there need to be strong soles and well-sewed uppers, and they will be none the worse for a bit of iron on the heels and the toes, in order that they may not wear out in the midst of the campaign. 'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' and these metals are harder than any of the rock that you will have to clamber over. Which being translated into plain fact is just this—a tranquil heart in amity with God is ready for all the road, is likely to make progress, and is fit for anything that it may be called to do.

A calm heart makes a light foot; and he who is living at peace with God, and with all disturbance within hushed to rest, will, for one thing, be able to see what his duty is. He will see his way as far as is needful for the moment. That is more than a good many of us can do when our eyes get confused, because our hearts are beating so loudly and fast, and our own wishes come in to hide from us God's will. But if we are weaned from ourselves, as we shall be if we are living in possession of the peace of God which passes understanding, the atmosphere will be transparent, as it is on some of the calm last days of autumn, and we shall see far ahead and know where we ought to go.

The quiet heart will be able to fling its whole strength into its work. And that is what troubled hearts never can do, for half their energy is taken up in steadying or quieting themselves, or is dissipated in going after a hundred other things. But when we are wholly engaged in quiet fellowship with Jesus Christ we have the whole of our energies at our command, and can fling ourselves wholly into our work for Him. The steam-engine is said to be a very imperfect machine which wastes more power than it utilises. That is true of a great many Christian people; they have the power, but they are so far away from that deep sense of tranquillity with God, of which my text speaks, that they waste much of the power that they have. And if we are to have for our motto 'Always Ready,' as an old Scottish family has, the only way to secure that is by having 'our feet shod with the preparedness' that comes from the Gospel that brings us peace. Brethren, duty that is done reluctantly, with hesitation, is not done. We must fling ourselves into the work gladly and be always 'ready for all Thy perfect will.'

There was an English commander, who died some years ago, who was sent for to the Horse Guards one day and asked, 'How long will it take for you to be ready to go to Scinde?' 'Half an hour,' said he; and in three-quarters he was in the train, on his road to reconquer a kingdom. That is how we ought to be; but we never shall be, unless we live habitually in tranquil communion with God, and in the full faith that we are at peace with Him through the blood of His Son. A quiet heart makes us ready for duty.

III. Again, the Gospel of peace prepares us for combat.

In ancient warfare battles were lost or won very largely according to the weight of the masses of men that were hurled against each other; and the heavier men, with the firmer footing, were likely to be the victors. Our modern scientific way of fighting is different from that. But in the old time the one thing needful was that a man should stand firm and resist the shock of the enemies as they rushed upon him. Unless our footing is good we shall be tumbled over by the onset of some unexpected antagonist. And for good footing there are two things necessary. One is a good, solid piece of ground to stand on, that is not slippery nor muddy, and the other is a good, strong pair of soldier's boots, that will take hold on the ground and help the wearer to steady himself. Christ has set our feet on the rock, and so the first requisite is secured. If we, for our part, will keep near to that Gospel which brings peace into our hearts, the peace that it brings will make us able to stand and bear unmoved any force that may be hurled against us. If we are to be 'steadfast, unmovable,' we can only be so when our feet are shod with the preparedness of the Gospel of peace.

The most of your temptations, most of the things that would pluck you away from Jesus Christ, and upset you in your standing will come down upon you unexpectedly. Nothing happens in this world except the unexpected; and it is the sudden assaults that we were not looking for that work most disastrously against us. A man may be aware of some special weakness in his character, and have given himself carefully and patiently to try to fortify himself against it, and, lo! all at once a temptation springs up from the opposite side; the enemy was lying in hiding there, and whilst his face was turned to fight with one foe, a foe that he knew nothing about came storming behind him. There is only one way to stand, and that is not merely by cultivating careful watchfulness against our own weaknesses, but by keeping fast hold of Jesus Christ manifested to us in His Gospel. Then the peace that comes from that communion will itself guard us.

You remember what Paul says in one of his other letters, where he has the same beautiful blending together of the two ideas of peace and warfare: 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall garrison your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.' It will be, as it were, an armed force within your heart which will repel all antagonism, and will enable you to abide in that Christ, through whom and in whom alone all peace comes. So, because we are thus liable to be overwhelmed by a sudden rush of unexpected temptation, and surprised into a sin before we know where we are, let us keep fast hold by that Gospel which brings peace, which will give us steadfastness, however suddenly the masked battery may begin to play upon us, and the foe may steal out of his ambush and make a rush against our unprotectedness. That is the only way, as I think, by which we can walk scatheless through the world.

Now, dear brethren, remember that this text is part of a commandment. We are to put on the shoes. How is that to be done? By a very simple way: a way which, I am afraid, a great many Christian people do not practise with anything like the constancy that they ought. For it is the Gospel that brings the peace, and if its peace brings the preparedness, then the way to get the preparedness is by soaking our minds and hearts in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

You hear a good deal nowadays about deepening the spiritual life, and people hold conventions for the purpose. All right; I have not a word to say against that. But, conventions or no conventions, there is only one thing that deepens the spiritual life, and that is keeping near the Christ from whom all the fulness of the spiritual life flows. If we will hold fast by our Gospel, and let its peace lie upon our minds, as the negative of a photograph lies upon the paper that it is to be printed upon, until the image of Jesus Christ Himself is reproduced in us, then we may laugh at temptation. For there will be no temptation when the heart is full of Him, and there will be no sense of surrendering anything that we wish to keep when the superior sweetness of His grace fills our souls. It is empty vessels into which poison can be poured. If the vessel is full there will be no room for it. Get your hearts and minds filled with the wine of the kingdom, and the devil's venom of temptation will have no space to get in. It is well to resist temptation; it is better to be lifted above it, so that it ceases to tempt. And the one way to secure that is to live near Jesus Christ, and let the Gospel of His grace take up more of our thoughts and more of our affections than it has done in the past. Then we shall realise the fulfilment of the promise: 'He will not suffer thy foot to be moved.'

THE SHIELD OF FAITH

'Above all, taking the shield of faith, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.'—EPH. vi. 16.

THERE were two kinds of shields in use in ancient warfare—one smaller, carried upon the arm, and which could be used, by a movement of the arm, for the defence of threatened parts of the body in detail; the other large, planted in front of the soldier, fixed in the ground, and all but covering his whole person. It is the latter which is referred to in the text, as the word which describes it clearly shows. That word is connected with the Greek word meaning 'door,' and gives a rough notion of the look of the instrument of defence —a great rectangular oblong, behind which a man could stand untouched and untouchable. And that is the kind of shield, says Paul, which we are to have—no little defence which may protect some part of the nature, but a great wall, behind which he who crouches is safe.

'Above all' does not mean here, as superficial readers take it to mean, most especially and primarily, as most important, but it simply means *in addition to* all these other things. Perhaps with some allusion to the fact that the shield protected the breastplate, as well as the breastplate protected the man, there may be a reference to the kind of double defence which comes to him who wears that breastplate and lies behind the shelter of a strong and resolute faith.

I. Now, looking at this metaphor from a practical point of view, the first thing to note is the missiles, 'the fiery darts of the wicked.'

Archæologists tell us that there were in use in ancient warfare javelins tipped with some kind of combustible, which were set on fire, and flung, so that they had not only the power of wounding but also of burning; and that there were others with a hollow head, which was in like manner filled, kindled, and thrown into the ranks of the enemy. I suppose that the Apostle's reason for specifying these fiery darts was simply that they were the most formidable offensive weapons that he had ever heard of. Probably, if he had lived to-day, he would have spoken of rifle-bullets or explosive shells, instead of fiery darts. But, though probably the Apostle had no further meaning in the metaphor than to suggest that faith was mightier than the mightiest assaults that can be hurled against it, we may venture to draw attention to two particulars in which this figure is specially instructive and warning. The one is the action of certain temptations in setting the soul on fire; the other is the suddenness with which they assail us.

'The fiery darts.' Now, I do not wish to confine that metaphor too narrowly to any one department of human nature, for our whole being is capable of being set on fire, and 'set on fire of hell,' as James says. But there are things in us all to which the fiery darts do especially appeal: desires, appetites, passions; or—to use the word which refined people are so afraid of, although the Bible is not, '*lusts*—which war against the soul,' and which need only a touch of fire to flare up like a tar-barrel, in thick foul smoke darkening the heavens. There are fiery darts that strike these animal natures of ours, and set them all aflame.

But, there are other fiery darts than these. There are plenty of other desires in us: wishes, cowardices, weaknesses of all sorts, that, once touched with the devil's dart, will burn fiercely enough. We all know that.

Then there is the other characteristic of suddenness. The dart comes without any warning. The arrow is invisible until it is buried in the man's breast. The pestilence walks in darkness, and the victim does not know until its poison fang is in him. Ah! yes! brethren, the most dangerous of our temptations are those that are sprung upon us unawares. We are going quietly along the course of our daily lives, occupied with quite other thoughts, and all at once, as if a door had opened, not out of heaven but out of hell, we are confronted with some evil thing that, unless we are instantaneously on our guard, will conquer us almost before we know. Evil tempts us because it comes to us, for the most part, without any beat of drum or blast of trumpet to say that it is coming, and to put us upon our guard. The batteries that do most harm to the advancing force are masked until the word of command is given, and then there is a flash from every cannon's throat and a withering hail of shot that confounds by its unexpectedness as well as kills by its blow. The fiery darts that light up the infernal furnace in a man's heart, and that smite him all unawares and unsuspecting, these are the weapons that we have to fear most

II. Consider next, the defence: 'the shield of faith.

Now, the Old Testament says things like this: 'Fear not, Abraham; I am thy Shield.' The psalmist invoked

God, in a rapturous exuberance of adoring invocations, as his fortress, and his buckler, and the horn of his salvation, and his high tower. The same psalm says, 'The Lord is a shield to all them that put their trust in Him'; and the Book of Proverbs, which is not given to quoting psalms, quotes that verse. Another psalm says, 'The Lord God is a sun and shield.'

And then Paul comes speaking of 'the shield of *faith*.' What has become of the other one? The answer is plain enough. My faith is nothing except for what it puts in front of me, and it is God who is truly my shield; my faith is only called a shield, because it brings me behind the bosses of the Almighty's buckler, against which no man can run a tilt, or into which no man can strike his lance, nor any devil either. God is a defence; and my trust, which is nothing in itself, is everything because of that with which it brings me into connection. Faith is the condition, and the only condition, of God's power flowing into me, and working in me. And when that power flows into me, and works in me, then I can laugh at the fiery darts, because 'greater is He that is with us than all they that are with them.'

So all the glorification which the New Testament pours out upon the act of faith properly belongs, not to the act itself, but to that with which the act brings us into connection. Wherefore, in the first Epistle of John, the Apostle, who recorded Christ's saying, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world,' translates it into, 'This is the victory that overcometh the world' —*not*, our Christ, but—'even our faith.' And it overcomes because it binds us in deep, vital union with Him who has overcome; and then all His conquering power comes into us.

That is the explanation and vindication of the turn which Paul gives to the Old Testament metaphor here, when he makes our shield to be faith. Suppose a man was exercising trust in one that was unworthy of it, would that trust defend him from anything? Suppose you were in peril of some great pecuniary loss, and were saying to yourself, 'Oh! I do not care. So-and-so has guaranteed me against any loss, and I trust to him,' and suppose he was a bankrupt, what would be the good of your trust? It would not bring the money back into your pocket. Suppose a man is leaning upon a rotten support; the harder he leans the sooner it will crumble. So there is no defence in the act of trust except what comes into it from the object of trust; and my faith is a shield only because it grasps the God who is the shield.

But, then, there is another side to that thought. My faith will quench, as nothing else will, these sudden impulses of fiery desires, because my faith brings me into the conscious presence of God, and of the unseen realities where He dwells. How can a man sin when God's eye is felt to be upon him? Suppose conspirators plotting some dark deed in a corner, shrouded by the night, as they think; and suppose, all at once, the day were to blaze in upon them, they would scatter, and drop their designs. Faith draws back the curtain which screens off that unseen world from so many of us, and lets in the light that shines down from above and shows us that we are compassed about by a cloud of witnesses, and the Captain of our Salvation in the midst of them. Then the fiery darts fizzle out, and the points drop off them. No temptation continues to flame when we see God.

They have contrivances in mills that they call 'automatic sprinklers.' When the fire touches them it melts away a covering, and a gas is set free that puts the fire out. And if we let in the thought of God, it will extinguish any flame. 'The sun puts out the fire in our grates,' the old women say. Let God's sun shine into your heart, and you will find that the infernal light has gone out. The shield of faith quenches the fiery darts of the 'wicked.'

Yes! and it does it in another way. For, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, faith realises 'the things hoped for,' as well as 'unseen.' And if a man is walking in the light of the great promises of Heaven, and the great threatenings of a hell, he will not be in much danger of being set on fire, even by 'the fiery darts of the wicked.' He that receives into his heart God's strength; he that by faith is conscious of the divine presence in communion with him; he that by faith walks in the light of eternal retribution, will triumph over the most sudden, the sharpest, and the most fiery of the darts that can be launched against him.

III. The Grasp of the Shield.

'*Taking* the shield,' then, there is something to be done in order to get the benefit of that defence. Now, there are a great many very good people at present who tell Christian men that they ought to exercise faith for sanctifying, as they exercise it for justifying and acceptance. And some of them—I do not say all—forget that there is effort needed to exercise faith for sanctifying; and that our energy has to be put forth in order that a man may, in spite of all resistance, keep himself in the attitude of dependence. So my text, whilst it proclaims that we are to trust for defence against, and victory over, recurring temptations, just as we trusted for forgiveness and acceptance at the beginning, proclaims also that there must be effort to grasp the shield, and to realise the defence which the shield gives to us.

For to trust is an act of the heart and will far more than of the head, and there are a great many hindrances that rise in the way of it; and to keep behind the shield, and not depend at all upon our own wit, our wisdom, or our strength, but wholly upon the Christ who gives us wit and wisdom, and strengthens our fingers to fight—that will take work! To occupy heart and mind with the object of faith is not an easy thing.

So, brethren, effort to compel the will and the heart to trust; effort to keep the mind in touch with the verities and the Person who are the objects of our faith; and effort to keep ourselves utterly and wholly ensconced behind the Shield, and never to venture out into the open, where our own arm has to keep our own heads, but to hang wholly upon Him—these things go to 'taking' the shield of faith. And it is because we fail in these, and not because there are any holes or weak places in the shield, that so many of the fiery darts find their way through, and set on fire and wound us. The Shield is impregnable, beaten as we have often been. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world'—and the devil and his darts—'even our faith.'

'THE HELMET OF SALVATION'

'Take the helmet of salvation.'—Eph. vi. 17.

We may, perhaps, trace a certain progress in the enumeration of the various pieces of the Christian armour in this context. Roughly speaking, they are in three divisions. There are first our graces of truth, righteousness, preparedness, which, though they are all conceived as given by God, are yet the exercises of our own powers. There is next, standing alone, as befits its all-comprehensive character, faith which is able to ward against and overcome not merely this and that temptation, but all forms of evil. That faith is the root of the three preceding graces, and makes the transition to the two which follow. because it is the hand by which we lay hold of God's gifts. The two final parts of the Christian armour are God's gifts, pure and simple—salvation and the word of God. So the progress is from circumference to centre, from man to God. From the central faith we have on the one hand that which it produces in us; on the other, that which it lays hold of from God. And these two last pieces of armour, being wholly God's gift, we are bidden with especial emphasis which is shown by a change in construction, to take or receive these.

I. The Salvation.

Once more Old Testament prophecy suggests the words of this exhortation. In Isaiah's grand vision of God, arising to execute judgment which is also redemption, we have a wonderful picture of His arraying Himself in armour. Righteousness is His flashing breastplate: on His head is an helmet of salvation. The gleaming steel is draped by garments of retributive judgment, and over all is cast, like a cloak, the ample folds of that 'zeal' which expresses the inexhaustible energy and intensity of the divine nature and action. Thus arrayed He comes forth to avenge and save. His redeeming work is the manifestation and issue of all these characteristics of His nature. It flames with divine fervour: it manifests the justice which repays, but its inmost character is righteousness, and its chief purpose is to save. His helmet is salvation; the plain, prose meaning of which would appear to be that His great purpose of saving men is its own guarantee that His purpose should be effected, and is the armour by which His work is defended.

The Apostle uses the old picture with perfect freedom, quoting the words indeed, but employing them quite differently. God's helmet of salvation is His own purpose; man's helmet of salvation is God's gift. He is strong to save because He wills to save; we are strong and safe when we take the salvation which He gives.

It is to be further noticed that the same image appears in Paul's rough draft of the Christian armour in Thessalonians, with the significant difference that there the helmet is 'the hope of salvation,' and here it is the salvation itself. This double representation is in full accord with all Scripture teaching, according to which we both possess and hope for salvation, and our possession determines the measure of our hope. That great word negatively implies deliverance from evil of any kind, and in its lower application, from sickness or peril of any sort. In its higher meaning in Scripture the evil from which we are saved is most frequently left unexpressed, but sometimes a little glimpse is given, as when we read that 'we are saved from wrath through Him,' or 'saved from sin.' What Christ saves us from is, first and chiefly, from sin in all aspects, its guilt, its power, and its penalty; but His salvation reaches much further than any mere deliverance from threatening evil, and positively means the communication to our weakness and emptiness of all blessings and graces possible for men. It is inward and properly spiritual, but it is also outward, and it is not fully possessed until we are clothed with 'salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.'

Hence, in Scripture our salvation is presented as past, as present, and as future. As past it is once for all received by initial faith in Christ; and, in view of their faith, Paul has no scruples as to saying to the imperfect Christians whose imperfections he scourges, 'Ye have been saved,' or in building upon that past fact his earnest exhortations and his scathing rebukes. The salvation is present if in any true sense it is past. There will be a daily growing deliverance from evil and a daily growing appropriation and manifestation of the salvation which we have received. And so Paul more than once speaks of Christians as 'being saved.' The process begun in the past is continued throughout the present, and the more a Christian man is conscious of its reality even amidst flaws, failures, stagnation, and lapses, the more assured will be his hope of the perfect salvation in the future, when all that is here, tendency often thwarted, and aspirations often balked, and sometimes sadly contradicted, will be completely, uninterruptedly, and eternally realised. If that hope flickers and is sometimes all but dead, the reason mainly lies in its flame not being fed by present experience.

II. The helmet of salvation.

This salvation in its present form will keep our heads in the day of battle. Its very characteristic is that it delivers us from evil, and all the graces with which Paul equips his ideal warrior are parts of the positive blessings which our salvation brings us. The more assured we are in our own happy consciousness of possessing the salvation of God, the more shall we be defended from all the temptations that seek to stir into action our lower selves. There will be no power in our fears to draw us into sin, and the possible evils that appeal to earthly passions of whatever sort will lose their power to disturb us, in the precise measure in which we know that we are saved in Christ. The consciousness of salvation will tend to damp down the magazine of combustibles that we all carry within us, and the sparks that fall will be as innocuous as those that light on wet gunpowder. If our thoughts are occupied with the blessings which we possess they will be guarded against the assaults of evil. The full cup has no room for poison. The eye that is gazing on the far-off white mountains does not see the filth and frivolities around. If we are living in conscious possession and enjoyment of what God gives us, we shall pass scatheless through the temptations which would otherwise fall on us and rend us. A future eagerly longed for, and already possessed in germ, will kill a present that would otherwise appeal to us with irresistible force.

III. Take the helmet.

We might perhaps more accurately read *receive* salvation, for that salvation is not won by any efforts of our own, but if we ever possess it, our possession is the result of our accepting it as a gift from God. The first word which the Gospel speaks to men and which makes it a Gospel, is not Do this or that, but Take this from the hands that were nailed to the Cross. The beginning of all true life, of all peace, of all self-control, of all hope, lies in the humble and penitent acceptance by faith of the salvation which Christ brings, and with which we have nothing to do but to accept it.

But Paul is here speaking to those whom he believes to have already exercised the initial faith which united them to Christ, and made His salvation theirs, and to these the exhortation comes with special force. To such it says, 'See to it that your faith ever grasps and feeds upon the great facts on which your salvation reposes—God's changeless love, Christ's all-sufficient sacrifice and ascended life, which He imparts to us if we abide in Him. Hold fast and prolong by continual repetition the initial act by which you received that salvation. It is said that on his death-bed Oliver Cromwell asked the Puritan divine who was standing by it whether a man who had once been in the covenant could be lost, and on being assured that he could not, answered, 'I know that I was once in it'; but such a building on past experiences is a building on sand, and nothing but continuous faith will secure a continuous salvation. A melancholy number of so-called Christians in this day have to travel far back through the years before they reach the period when they took the helmet of salvation. They know that they were far better men, and possessed a far deeper apprehension of Christ and His power in the old days than is theirs now, and they need not wonder if God's great gift has unnoticed slipped from their relaxed grasp. A hand that clings to a rock while a swollen flood rushes past needs to perpetually be tightening its grip, else the man will be swept away; and the present salvation, and, still more, the hope of a future salvation, are not ours on any other terms than a continual repetition of the initial act by which we first received them. But there must also be a continually increased appropriation and manifestation in our lives of a progressive salvation that will come as a result of a constantly renewed faith; but it will not come unless there be continuous effort to work into our characters, and to work out in our lives, the transforming and vitalising power of the life given to us in Jesus

Christ. If our present experience yields no sign of growing conformity to the image of our Saviour, there is only too abundant reason for doubting whether we have experienced a past salvation or have any right to anticipate a perfect future salvation.

The last word to be said is, Live in frequent anticipation of that perfect future. If that anticipation is built on memory of the past and experience of the present, it cannot be too confident. That hope maketh not ashamed. In the region of Christian experience alone the weakest of us has a right to reckon on the future, and to be sure that when that great to-morrow dawns for us, it 'shall be as this day and much more abundant.' With this salvation in its imperfect form brightening the present, and in its completeness filling the future with unimaginable glory, we can go into all the conflicts of this fighting world and feel that we are safe because God covers our heads in the day of battle. Unless so defended we shall go into the fight as the naked Indians did with the Spanish invaders, and be defeated as they were. The plumes may be shorn off the helmet, and it may be easily dinted, but the head that wore it will be unharmed. And when the battle and the noise of battle are past, the helmet will be laid aside, and we shall be able to say, 'I have fought a good fight, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.'

'THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT'

'The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.'—Eph. vi. 17.

We reach here the last and only offensive weapon in the panoply. The 'of' here does not indicate apposition, as in the 'shield of faith,' or 'the helmet of salvation,' nor is it the 'of' of possession, so that the meaning is to be taken as being the sword which the Spirit wields, but it is the 'of' expressing origin, as in the 'armour of God'; it is the sword which the Spirit supplies. The progress noted in the last sermon from subjective graces to objective divine facts, is completed here, for the sword which is put into the Christian soldier's hand is the gift of God, even more markedly than is the helmet which guards his head in the day of battle.

I. Note what the word of God is.

The answer which would most commonly and almost unthinkingly be given is, I suppose, the Scriptures; but while this is on the whole true, it is to be noted that the expression employed here properly means a word spoken, and not the written record. Both in the Old and in the New Testaments the word of God means more than the Bible; it is the authentic utterance of His will in all shapes and applying to all the facts of His creation. In the Old Testament 'God said' is the expression in the first chapter of Genesis for the forth-putting of the divine energy in the act of creation, and long ages after that divine poem of creation was written a psalmist re-echoed the thought when he said 'For ever, O Lord, Thy word is settled in the heavens. Thou hast established the earth and it abideth.'

But, further, the expression designates the specific messages which prophets and others received. These are not in the Old Testament spoken of as a unity: they are individual words rather than a word. Each of them is a manifestation of the divine will and purpose; many of them are commandments; some of them are warnings; and all, in some measure, reveal the divine nature.

That self-revelation of God reaches for us in this life its permanent climax, when He who 'at sundry times and in divers manner spake unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by a Son.' Jesus is the personal 'word of God,' though that name by which He is designated in the New Testament is a different expression from that employed in our text, and connotes a whole series of different ideas.

The early Christian teachers and apostles had no hesitation in taking that sacred name—the word of the Lord—to describe the message which they spoke. One of their earliest prayers when they were left alone was, that with all boldness they might speak Thy word; and throughout the whole of the Acts of the Apostles the preached Gospel is designated as the word of God, even as Peter in his epistle quotes one of the noblest of the Old Testament sayings, and declares that the 'word of the Lord' which 'abideth for ever' is 'the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.'

Clearly, then, Paul here is exhorting the Ephesian Christians, most of whom probably were entirely ignorant of the Old Testament, to use the spoken words which they had heard from him and other preachers of the Gospel as the sword of the Spirit. Since he is evidently referring to Christian teaching, it is obvious that he regards the old and the new as one whole, that to him the proclamation of Jesus was the perfection of what had been spoken by prophets and psalmists. He claims for his message and his brethren's the same place and dignity that belonged to the former messengers of the divine will. He asserts, and all the more strongly, because it is an assertion by implication only, that the same Spirit which moved in the prophets and saints of former days is moving in the preachers of the Gospel, and that their message has a wider sweep, a deeper content, and a more radiant light than that which had been delivered in the past. The word of the Lord had of old partially declared God's nature and His will: the word of God which Paul preached was in his judgment the complete revelation of God's loving heart, the complete exhibition to men of God's commandments of old; longing eyes had seen a coming day and been glad and confidently foretold it, now the message was 'the coming one has come.'

It is as the record and vehicle of that spoken Gospel, as well as of its earlier premonitions, that the Bible has come to be called the word of God, and the name is true in that He speaks in this book. But much harm has resulted from the appropriation of the name exclusively to the book, and the forgetfulness that a vehicle is one thing and that which it carries quite another.

II. The purpose and power of the word.

The sword is the only offensive weapon in the list. The spear which played so great a part in ancient warfare is not named. It may well be noted that only a couple of verses before our text we read of the Gospel of peace, and that here with remarkable freedom of use of his metaphors, Paul makes the word of God, which as we have seen is substantially equivalent to the preached Gospel, the one weapon with which Christian men are to cut and thrust. Jesus said 'I come not to send peace, but a sword,' but Paul makes the apparent contradiction still more acute when he makes the very Gospel itself the sword. We may recall as a parallel, and possibly a copy of our text, the great words of the Epistle to the Hebrews which speak of the word of God as 'living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword.' And we cannot forget the magnificent symbolism of the Book of Revelation which saw in the midst of the candlestick one like unto a Son of Man, and 'out of His mouth proceeded a sharp, two-edged sword.' That image is the poetic embodiment of our Lord's own words which we have just quoted, and implies the penetrating power of the word which Christ's gentle lips have uttered. Gracious and healing as it is, a Gospel of peace, it has an edge and a point which cut down through all sophistications of human error, and lay bare the 'thoughts and intents of the heart.' The revelation made by Christ has other purposes which are not less important than its ministering of consolation and hope. It is intended to help us in our fight with evil, and the solemn old utterance, 'with the breath of His mouth He will slay the wicked,' is true in reference to the effect of the word of Christ on moral evil. Such slaying is but the other side of the life-giving power which the word exercises on a heart subject to its influence. For the Christian soldier's conflict with evil as threatening the health of his own Christian life, or as tyrannising over the lives of others, the sword of the Spirit is the best weapon.

We are not to take the rough-and-ready method, which is so common among good people, of identifying this spirit-given sword with the Bible. If for no other reason, yet because it is the Spirit which supplies it to the grasp of the Christian soldier, our possession of it is therefore a result of the action of that Spirit on the individual Christian spirit; and what He gives, and we are to wield, is 'the *engrafted* word which is able to save our souls.' That word, lodged in our hearts, brings to us a revelation of duty and a chart of life, because it brings a loving recognition of the character of our Father, and a glad obedience to His will. If that word dwell in us richly, in all wisdom, and if we do not dull the edge of the sword by our own unworthy handling of it, we shall find it pierce to the 'dividing asunder of joints and marrow,' and the evil within us will either be cast out from us, or will shrivel itself up, and bury itself deep in dark corners.

Love to Christ will be so strong, and the things that are not seen will so overwhelmingly outweigh the things that are seen, that the solemn majesty of the eternal will make the temporal look to our awed eyes the contemptible unreality which it really is. They who humbly receive and faithfully use that engrafted word, have in it a sure touchstone against which their own sins and errors are shivered. It is for the Christian consciousness the true Ithuriel's spear, at the touch of which 'upstarts in his own shape the fiend' who has been pouring his whispered poison into an unsuspicious ear. The standard weights and measures are kept in government custody, and traders have to send their yard measures and scales thither if they wish them tested; but the engrafted word, faithfully used and submitted to, is always at hand, and ready to pronounce its decrees, and to cut to the quick the evil by which the understanding is darkened and conscience sophisticated.

III. The manner of its use.

Here that is briefly but sufficiently expressed by the one commandment, 'take,' or perhaps more accurately, 'receive.' Of course, properly speaking, that exhortation does not refer to our manner of fighting with the sword, but to the previous act by which our hand grasps it. But it is profoundly true that if we take it in the deepest sense, the possession of it will teach the use of it. No instruction will impart the last, and little instruction is needed for the first. What is needed is the simple act of yielding ourselves to Jesus Christ, and looking to Him only, as our guide and strength. Before all Christian warfare must come the possession of the Christian armour, and the commandment that here lies at the beginning of all Paul's description of it is '*Take*.' Our fitness for the conflict all depends on our receiving God's gift, and that reception is no mere passive thing, as if God's grace could be poured into a human spirit as water is into a bucket. Hence, the translation of this commandment of Paul's by 'take' is better than that by 'receive,' inasmuch as it brings into prominence man's activity, though it gives too exclusive importance to that, to the detriment of the far deeper and more essential element of the divine action. The two words are, in fact, both needed to cover the whole ground of what takes place when the giving God and the taking man concur in the great act by which the Spirit of God takes up its abode in a human spirit. God's gift is to be received as purely His gift, undeserved, unearned by us. But undeserved and unearned as it is, and given 'without money and without price,' it is not ours unless our hand is stretched out to take, and our fingers closed tightly over the free gift of God. There is a dead lift of effort in the reception; there is a still greater effort needed for the continued possession, and there is a life-long discipline and effort needed for the effective use in the struggle of daily life of the sword of the Spirit.

If that engrafted word is ever to become sovereign in our lives, there must be a life-long attempt to bring the tremendous truths as to God's will for human conduct which it plants in our minds into practice, and to bring all our practice under their influence. The motives which it brings to bear on our evils will be powerless to smite them, unless these motives are made sovereign in us by many an hour of patient meditation and of submission to their sweet and strong constraint. One sometimes sees on a wild briar a graft which has been carefully inserted and bandaged up, but which has failed to strike, and so the strain of the briar goes on and no rosebuds come. Are there not some of us who profess to have received the engrafted word and whose daily experience has proved, by our own continual sinfulness, that it is unable to 'save our souls'?

There are in the Christian ranks some soldiers whose hands are too nerveless or too full of worldly trash to grasp the sword which they have received, much less to strike home with it at any of the evils that are devastating their own lives or darkening the world. The feebleness of the Christian conflict with evil, in all its forms, whether individual or social, whether intellectual or moral, whether heretical or grossly and frankly sensual, is mainly due to the feebleness with which the average professing Christians grasp the sword of the Spirit. When David asked the priests for weapons, and they told him that Goliath's sword was lying wrapt in a cloth behind the ephod, and that they had none other, he said, 'There is none like that, give it me.' If we are wise, we will take the sword that lies in the secret place, and, armed with it, we shall not need to fear in any day of battle.

We do well that we take heed to the word of God, 'as unto a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawn,' when swords will be no more needed, and the Word will no longer shine in darkness but be the Light that makes the Sun needless for the brightness of the New Jerusalem.

PEACE, LOVE, AND FAITH

'Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith.'—Eph. vi. 23.

The numerous personal greetings usually found at the close of Paul's letters are entirely absent from this Epistle. All which we have in their place is this entirely general good wish, and the still more general and wider one in the subsequent verse.

There is but one other of the Apostle's letters similarly devoid of personal messages, viz. the Epistle to the Galatians, and their absence there is sufficiently accounted for by the severe and stern tone of that letter. But it is very difficult to understand how they should not appear in a letter to a church with which the Apostle had such prolonged and cordial relations as he had with the church at Ephesus. And hence the absence of these personal greetings is a strong confirmation of the opinion that this Epistle was not originally addressed to the church at Ephesus, but was a kind of circular intended to go round the various churches in Asia Minor, and only sent first to that at Ephesus. That opinion is further confirmed by the fact known to many of you that in some good ancient manuscripts the words 'at Ephesus' are omitted from the first verse of the letter; which thus stands without any specific address.

Be that as it may, this trinity of inward graces is Paul's highest and best wish for his friends. He has no earthly prosperity to wish for them. His ambition soars higher than that; he desires for them peace, love, faith.

Now, will you take the lesson? There is no better test of a man than the things that he wishes for the people that he loves most. He desires for them, of course, his own ideal of happiness. What do you desire most for those that are dearest to you? You parents, do you train up your children, for instance, so as to secure, or to do your best to secure, not outward prosperity, but these loftier gifts; and for yourselves, when you are forming your wishes, are these the things that you want most? 'Set your affections on things above,' and remember that whoso has that trinity of graces, peace, love, faith, is rich and blessed, whatsoever else he has or needs. And whoso has them not is miserable and poor.

But I wish especially to look a little more closely at these three things in themselves and in their relation to one another. I take it that the Apostle is here tracking the stream to its fountain; that he is beginning with effects and working backwards and downwards to causes; so that to get the order of nature and of time we must reverse the order here, and begin where he ends and end where he begins. The Christian life in its higher vigour and excellence is rooted in faith. That faith associates to itself, and is inseparably connected with love, and the faith and love together issue in a deep restful tranquillity which nothing can break.

Now let us look at these three things as the three greatest blessings that any can bear in their hearts, and wring out of time, sorrow, and change.

I. First, the root of everything is a continuous and growing trust.

Remember that this prayer or wish of my text was spoken in reference to brethren; that is to say, to those who, by the hypothesis, already possessed Christian faith. And Paul wishes for them, and can wish for them, nothing better and more than the increase and continuousness of that which they already possess. The highest blessing that the brethren can receive is the enlargement and the strengthening of their faith.

Now we talk so much in Christian teaching about this 'faith' that, I fancy, like a worn sixpence in a man's pocket, its very circulation from hand to hand has worn off the lettering. And many of us, from the very familiarity of the word, have only a dim conception of what it means. It may not be profitless, then, to remind you, first of all, that this faith is neither more nor less than a very familiar thing which you are constantly exercising in reference to one another—that is to say, simple confidence. You trust your husband, your wife, your child, your parent, your friend, your guide, your lawyer, your doctor, your banker. Take that very same emotion and attitude of the mind by which you put your well-being, in different aspects and provinces, into the hands of men and women round about you; lift the trailing flowers that go all straggling along the ground, and twine them round the pillars of God's throne, and you get the confidence, the trust, of the praises and glories of which the New Testament is full. There is nothing mysterious in it, it is simply the exercise of confidence, the familiar cement that binds all human relationship together, and makes men brotherly and kindred with their kind. Faith is trust, and trust saves a man's soul.

Then, remember further that the faith which is the foundation of everything is essentially personal trust reposing upon a person, upon Jesus Christ. You cannot get hold of a man in any other way than by that The only real bond that binds people together is the personal bond of confidence, manifesting itself in love. And it is no mere doctrine that we present for a man's faith, but it is the person about whom the doctrine speaks. We say, indeed, that we can only know the person on whom we must trust by the revelation of the truths concerning Him which make the Christian doctrines; but a man may believe the whole of them, and have no faith. And what is the step in advance which is needed in order to turn credence into faith—belief in a doctrine into trust? In one view it is the step from the doctrine to the person. When you grasp Christ, the living Christ, and not merely the doctrine, for yours, then you have faith.

Only remember, my brother, if you say you trust Christ, the question has immediately to be asked: What Christ is it that you are trusting? Is it the Christ that died for your sins on the Cross, or is it a Christ that taught you some great moral truths and set you a lovely example of life and conduct? Which of the two is it? for these two Christs are very different, and the faith that grasps the one is extremely unlike the faith that grasps the other. And so I press upon you this question: What Christ is it to Whom your confidence turns, and for what is it that you are looking to Him? Is it for help and guidance of some vague kind; is it for pattern or example, or is it for the salvation of your sinful souls, by the might of His great sacrifice?

Then, remember still further, that this personal outgoing of confidence, which is the action both of a man's will and of a man's intellect, to the person revealed to us in the great doctrines of the Gospel—that this faith, if it is to be worth anything, must be continuous. Paul could desire nothing better for his Ephesian friends than that they should have that which they had—faith;

that they should continue to have it, and that it should be perennial and increasing all through their lives. You can no more get present good from past faith than the breath you drew yesterday into your lungs will be sufficient to oxygenate your blood at this moment. As soon as you break the electric contact, the electric light goes out, and no matter how long a man has been living a life of faith, that past life will not in the smallest degree help him at the present moment unless the faith is continuous. Remember this, then, a broken faith is a broken peace; a broken faith is a broken salvation; and so long, and only so long, as you are knit to Jesus Christ by the conscious exercise of a faith realised at the moment, are you in the reception of blessing from Him at the moment.

And, still further, this faith ought to be progressive. So Paul desired it to be with these people. If there is no growth, do you think there is much life? I know I am speaking to plenty of people who call themselves Christians, whose faith is not one inch better to-day than it was when it was born—perhaps a little less rather than more. Oh! the hundreds and thousands of professing Christians, average Christians, that clog and weaken all churches, whose faith has no progressive element in it, and is not a bit stronger by all the discipline of life and by their experience of its power. Brethren! is it so with us? Let us ask ourselves that; and let us ask very solemnly this other question: If my faith has no growth, how do I know that it has got any life?

And so let me remind you further that this faith, the personal outgoing of a man's intellect and will to the personal Saviour revealed in the Scriptures as the sacrifice for our sins, and the life of our spirits, which ought to be continuous and progressive, is the foundation of all strength, blessedness, goodness, in a human character; and if we have it we have the germ of all possible excellence and growth, not because of what it is in itself, for in itself it is nothing more than the opening of the heart to the reception of the celestial influences of grace and righteousness that He pours down. And, therefore, this is the thing that a wise man will most desire for himself, and for those that are dearest to him.

Depend upon it, whether it is what we want most or not, it is what God wants most for us. He does not care nearly so much that our lives should be joyful as that they should be righteous and full of faith; and He subjects us to many a sorrow and loss and disappointment in order that the life of nature may be broken and the life of faith may be strong. If we rightly understand the relative value of outward and of inward things, we shall be thankful for the storms that drive us nearer to Him; for the darkening earth that may make the pillar of cloud glow at the heart into a pillar of fire, and for all the discipline, painful though it may be, with which God answers the prayer, 'Lord, increase our faith.'

II. And now, next, notice how inseparably associated with a true faith is love.

The one is effect that never is found without its cause; the other is cause which never but produces its effect. These two are braided together by the Apostle as inseparable in reality and inseparable in thought. And that it is so is plain enough, and there follow from it some practical lessons that I desire to lay upon your hearts and my own.

There are, then, here two principles, or rather two sides of one thought; no faith without love, no love without faith.

No faith is genuine and deep which does not at once produce in the heart where it is lodged an answering love to God. That is clear enough. Faith is, as I have said, the recognition and the reception of the divine love into the heart; and we are so constituted as that if a man once knows and believes in any real sense the love that God has to him, he answers it back again with his love as certainly as an echo which gives back the sound that reaches it.

Our faith is, if I may so say, like a burning-glass, which concentrates the rays of the divine love upon our hearts, and focuses them into a point that kindles our hearts into flame. If we have the confidence that God loves us, in any real depth, we shall answer by the gush of our love to Him.

And so here is a test for men's faith. You call yourselves Christians. If I were to come to you and ask you, 'Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?' most of you would say, 'Yes!' Try your faith, my friend, by this test: Does it make you love Him at all? If it does not, it is more words than anything else; and it needs a wonderful deepening before it can have any real power in your hearts. There is no faith worthy the name unless its child, all but as old as itself, be the answer of the heart to Him, pouring itself out in thankful gratitude.

No love without faith; 'we love Him because He first loved us.' God must begin, we can only come second. Man's natural selfishness is only overcome by the clearest demonstration of the love of God to him; and until that love, in its superbest because its lowliest form, the form of the sacrifice on the Cross, has penetrated into a man's heart through his faith, there will be no love.

So then, dear friends, there is a test for your love. We hear a great deal said nowadays, as there has always been a great deal said, about the essence of all religion consisting in love to God; and about men 'rejecting the cumbrous dogmas of the New Testament, and falling back upon the great and simple truths, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself,' and saying 'that is their religion.' Well, I venture to say that without the faith of the heart in, not the cumbrous dogmas, but the central fact of the New Testament, that Christ died on the Cross for me, you will never get the old commandment of love to God with heart and soul and strength and mind really kept and carried out; and that if you want men to have their hearts and wills bound into loving fellowship with God, it is only by the path of faith in Him who is the sacrifice for sin that such fellowship is reached. Hence there follows a very plain, practical advice. Do you want your heart's love to be increased? Learn the way to do it. You cannot work yourselves into a fervour of religious emotion of any valuable kind. A man cannot get to love more by saying, 'I am determined I will.' We have no direct control over our affections in that fashion. You cannot make water boil except by one way, and that is by putting plenty of fire under it; and you cannot make your affections melt and flow except by heating them by the contemplation of the truth which is intended to bring them out. That is to say, the more we exercise our minds on the contemplation of Christ's great love to us, and the more we put forth the energies of our souls in the act of simple self-distrust and reliance upon Him, the more will our love be fervent and strong. You can only increase love by increasing the faith from which it comes. So do you see to it, if you call yourselves Christians, that you try to deepen all your Christian affections by an honest, meditative, prayerful contemplation and grasp of the great love of God in Jesus Christ. And do not wonder if your Christian life be, as it is in so many of us, stunted, not progressive, bringing no blessing to ourselves, and little good to anybody else. The explanation is easy enough. You do not look at the Cross of Christ, nor live in the contemplation and reception of His great grace.

III. And now, lastly, these two inseparably associated graces of faith and love bring with them, and lead to, the third—peace.

It seems to be but a very modest, sober-tinted wish which the Apostle here has for his brethren that the highest and best thing he can ask for them is only quiet. Very modest by the side of joy and excitement, in their coats of many colours, and yet the deepest and truest blessing that any of us can have—peace. It comes to us by one path, and that is by the path of faith and love.

These two bring peace with God, peace in our inmost spirits, the peace of self-annihilation and submission, the peace of obedience, the peace of ceasing from our own works, and entering, therefore, into the rest of God. Trust is peace. There is no tranquillity like that of feeling 'I am not responsible for this: He is; and I rest myself on Him.'

Love is peace. There is no rest for our hearts but on the bosom of some one that is dear to us, and in whom we can confide. But ah, brother! every tree in which the dove nestles is felled down sooner or later, and the nest torn to pieces, and the bird flies away. But if we turn ourselves to the undying Christ, the perpetual revelation of the eternal God, then, then our love and our faith will bring us rest. There will be peace in trusting Him whom we never can trust and be put to shame. There will be peace in loving Him who is more than worthy of and able to repay the deep and perennial love of all hearts.

Self-surrender is peace. It is our wills that trouble us. Disturbance comes, not from without, but from within. When the will bows, when I say, 'Be it then as Thou wilt,' when in faith and love I cease to strive, to murmur, to rebel, to repine, and enter into His loving purposes, then there is peace.

Obedience is peace. To recognise a great will that is sovereign, and to bow myself to it, not because it is sovereign, but because it is sweet, and sweet because I love it, and love Him whose it is—that is peace. And then, whatever may be outward circumstances, there shall be 'peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation'; and deep in my soul I may be tranquil, though all about me may be the hurly-burly of the storm.

The Christian peace is an armed peace, paradoxical as it appears; and according to the great word of the Apostle, is a sentry which garrisons the beleaguered heart and mind, surrounded by many foes, and keeps them in Christ Jesus.

'There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,' he is 'as a troubled sea which cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt'; but over the wildest commotion one Voice, low, gentle, omnipotent, says: 'Peace! be still!' and the heart quiets itself, though there may be a ground swell, and the weather clears. He is your peace, trust Him, love Him, and you cannot but possess the 'peace of God which passeth understanding.'

THE WIDE RANGE OF GOD'S GRACE

'Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.
EPHES. vi. 24.

In turning to the great words which I have read as a text, I ask you to mark their width and their simplicity. They are wide; they follow a very comprehensive benediction, with which, so to speak, they are concentric. But they sweep a wider circle. The former verse says, 'Peace be to the brethren.' But beyond the brethren in these Asiatic churches (as a kind of circular letter to whom this epistle was probably sent) there rises before the mind of the Apostle a great multitude, in every nation, and they share in his love, and in the promise and the prayer of my text. Mark its simplicity everything is brought down to its most general expression. All the qualifications for receiving the divine gift are gathered up in one—love. All the variety of the divine gifts is summed up in that one comprehensive expression—'grace.'

I. So then, note, first, the comprehensive designation of the recipients of grace.

They are 'all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in incorruption.' Little need be said explanatory of the force of this general expression. We usually find that where Scripture reduces the whole qualification for the reception of the divine gift, and the conditions which unite to Jesus Christ, to one, it is faith, not love, that is chosen. But here the Apostle takes the process at the second stage, and instead of emphasising the faith which is the first step, he dwells upon the love which is its uniform consequence. This love rests upon the faith in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Then note the solemn fulness of the designations of the object of this faith-born love. 'Jesus Christ our Lord'—the name of His humanity; the name of His office; the designation of His dominion. He is Jesus the Man. Jesus is the Christ, the Fulfiller of all prophecy; the flower of all previous revelation; the Anointed of God with the fulness of His Divine Spirit as Prophet, Priest, and King. Jesus Christ is the Lord—which, at the lowest, expresses sovereignty, and if regard be had to the Apostolic usage, expresses something more, even participation in Deity. And it is this whole Christ, the Jesus, the Christ, the Lord; the love to whom, built upon the faith in Him in all these aspects and characteristics, constitutes the true unity of the true Church.

That Church is not built upon a creed, but it is built upon a whole Christ, and not a maimed one. And so we must have a love which answers to all those sides of that great revealed character, and is warm with human love to Jesus; and is trustful with confiding love to the Christ; and is lowly with obedient love to the Lord. And I venture to go a step further, and say, —and is devout with adoring love to the eternal Son of the Father. This is the Apostle's definition of what makes a Christian: Faith that grasps the whole Christ and love that therefore flows to Him. It binds all who possess it into one great unity. As against a spurious liberalism which calls them Christians who lay hold of a fragment of the one entire and perfect chrysolite, we must insist that a Christian is one who knows Jesus, who knows Christ, who knows the Lord, and who loves Him in all these aspects. Only we must remember, too, that many a time a man's heart outruns his creed, and that many a soul glows with truer, deeper, more saving devotion and trust to a Christ whom the intellect imperfectly apprehends, than are realised by unloving hearts that are associated with clearer heads. Orchids grow in rich men's greenhouses, fastened to a bit of stick, and they spread a fairer blossom that lasts longer than many a plant that is rooted in a more fertile soil. Let us be thankful for the blessed inconsistencies which knit some to the Christ who is more to them than they know.

There is also here laid down for us the great principle, as against all narrowness and all externalism, and all so-called ecclesiasticism, that to be joined to Jesus Christ is the one condition which brings a man into the blessed unity of the Church. Now it seems to me that, however they may be to be lamented on other grounds, and they are to be lamented on many, the existence of diverse Churches does not necessarily interfere with this deep-seated and central unity. There is a great deal said to-day about the reunion of Christendom, by which is meant the destruction of existing communions and the formation of a wider one. I do not believe, and I suppose you do not, that our existing ecclesiastical organisations are the final form of the Church of the living God. But let us remember that the two things are by no means contradictory, the belief in, and the realising of, the essential unity of the Church, and the existence of diverse communions. You will see on the side of many a Cumberland hill a great stretch of limestone with clefts a foot or two deep in it—there are flowers in the clefts, by the bye—but go down a couple of yards and the divisions have all disappeared, and the base-rock stretches continuously. The separations are superficial; the unity is fundamental. Do not let us play into the hands of people whose only notion of unity is that of a mechanical juxtaposition held together by some formula or orders; but let us recognise that the true unity is in the presence of Jesus Christ in the midst, and in the common grasp of Him by us all.

There is a well-known hymn which was originally intended as a High Church manifesto, which thrusts at us Nonconformists when it sings:

> '*We* are not divided,
> All one body *we*.'

And oddly enough, but significantly too, it has found its way into all our Nonconformist hymn-books, and we, 'the sects,' are singing it, with perhaps a nobler conception of what the oneness of the body, and the unity of the Church is, than the writer of the words had. 'We are not divided,' though we be organised apart. 'All one body we,' for we all partake of that one bread, and the unifying principle is a common love to the one Jesus Christ our Lord.

II. Mark the impartial sweep of the divine gifts.

My text is a benediction, or a prayer; but it is also a prophecy, or a statement, of the inevitable and uniform results of love to Jesus Christ. The grace will follow that love, necessarily and certainly, and the lovers will get the gift of God because their love has brought them into living contact with Jesus Christ; and His life will flow over into theirs. I need not remind you that the word 'grace' in Scripture means, first of all, the condescending love of God to inferiors, to sinners, to those who deserved something else; and, secondly, the whole fulness of blessing and gift that follow upon that love.

And, says Paul, these great gifts from heaven, the one gift in which all are comprised, will surely follow the opening of the heart in love to Jesus Christ.

Ah, brethren! God's grace makes uncommonly short work of ecclesiastical distinctions. The great river flows through territories that upon men's maps are painted in different colours, and of which the inhabitants speak in different tongues. The Rhine laves the pine-trees of Switzerland, and the vines of Germany, and the willows of Holland; and God's grace flows through all places where the men that love Him do dwell. It rises, as it were, right over the barriers that they have built between each other. The little pools on the sea-shore are separate when the tide is out, but when it comes up it fills all the pot-holes that the pebbles have made, and unifies them in one great flashing, dancing mass; and so God's grace comes to all that love Him, and confirms their unity.

Surely that is the true test of a living Church. 'When Barnabas came, and saw the grace of God, he was glad.' It was not what he had expected, but he was open to conviction. The Church where he saw it had been very irregularly constituted; it had no orders and no sacraments, and had been set a-going by the spontaneous efforts of private Christians, and he came to look into the facts. He asked for nothing more when he saw that the converts had the life within them. And so we, with all our faults—and God forbid that I should seem to minimise these—with all our faults, we poor Nonconformists, left to the uncovenanted mercies, have our share of that gift of grace as truly, and, if our love be deeper, more abundantly, than the Churches that are blessed with orders and sacraments, and an 'unbroken historical continuity.' And when we are unchurched for our lack of these, let us fall back upon St. Augustine's 'Where Christ is, there the Church is'; and believe that to us, even to us also, the promise is fulfilled, 'Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.'

III. Lastly, note the width to which our sympathies should go.

The Apostle sends out his desires and prayers so as to encircle the same area as the grace of God covers and as His love enfolds. And we are bound to do the same.

I am not going to talk about organic unity. The age for making new denominations is, I suppose, about over. I do not think that any sane man would contemplate starting a new Church nowadays. The rebound from the iron rigidity of a mechanical unity that took place at the Reformation naturally led to the multiplication of communities, each of which laid hold of something that to it seemed important. The folly of ecclesiastical rulers who insisted upon non-essentials lays the guilt of the schism at *their* doors, and not at the doors of the minority who could not, in conscience, accept that which never should have been insisted upon as a condition. But whilst we must all feel that power is lost, and much evil ensues from the isolation, such as it is, of the various Churches, yet we must remember that re-union is a slow process; that an atmosphere springs up round each body which is a very subtle, but none the less a very powerful, force, and that it will take a very, very long time to overcome the difficulties and to bring about any reconstruction on a large scale. But why should there be three Presbyterian Churches in Scotland, with the same creed, confessions of faith, and ecclesiastical constitution? Why should there be half a dozen Methodist bodies in England, of whom substantially the same thing may be said? Will it always pass the wit of man for Congregationalists and Baptists to be one body, without the sacrifice of conviction upon either side? Surely no! You young men may see these fair days; men like me can only hope that they will come and do a little, such as may be possible in a brief space, to help them on.

Putting aside, then, all these larger questions, I want, in a sentence or two, to insist with you upon the duty that lies on us all, and which every one of us may bear a share in discharging. There ought to be a far deeper consciousness of our fundamental unity. They talk a great deal about 'the rivalries of jarring sects.' I believe that is such an enormous exaggeration that it is an untruth. There is rivalry, but you know as well as I do that, shabby and shameful as it is, it is a kind of commercial rivalry between contiguous places of worship, be they chapels or churches, be they buildings belonging to the same or to different denominations. I, for my part, after a pretty long experience now, have seen so little of that said bitter rivalry between the Nonconformist sects, *as sects*, that to me it is all but non-existent. And I believe the most of us ministers, going about amongst the various communities, could say the same thing. But in the face of a cultivated England laughing at your creed of Jesus, the Christ, the Lord; and in the face of a strange and puerile recrudescence of sacerdotalism and sacramentarianism, which shoves a priest and a rite into the place where Christ should stand, it becomes us Nonconformists who believe that we know a more excellent way to stand shoulder to shoulder, and show that the unities that bind us are far more than the diversities that separate.

It becomes us, too, to further conjoint action in social matters. Thank God we are beginning to stir in that direction in Manchester—not before it was time. And I beseech you professing Christians, of all Evangelical communions, to help in bringing Christian motives and principles to bear on the discussion of social and municipal and economical conditions in this great city of ours.

And there surely ought to be more concert than we have had in aggressive work; that we should a little more take account of each other's action in regulating our own; and that we should not have the scandal, which we too often have allowed to exist, of overlapping one another in such a fashion as that rivalry and mere trade competition is almost inevitable.

These are very humble, prosaic suggestions, but they would go a long way, if they were observed, to sweeten our own tempers, and to make visible to the world our true unity. Let us all seek to widen our sympathies as widely as Christ's grace flows; to count none strangers whom He counts friends; to discipline ourselves to feel that we are girded with that electric chain which makes all who grasp it one, and sends the same keen thrill through them all. If a circle were a mile in diameter, and its circumference were dotted with many separate points, how much nearer each of these would be if it were moved inwards, on a straight line, closer to the centre, so as to make a circle a foot across. The nearer we come to the One Lord, in love, communion, and likeness, the nearer shall we be to one another.

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